

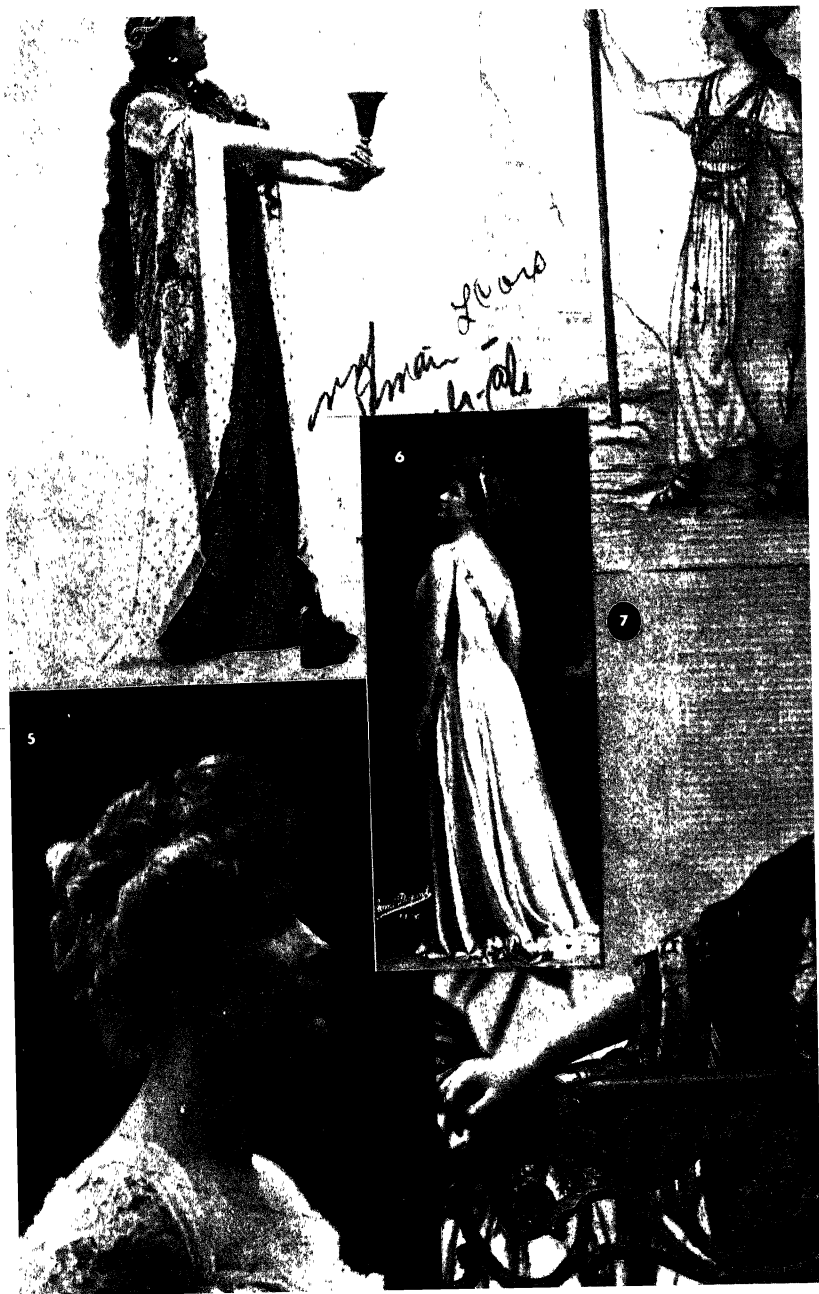


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## THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

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*Published on the same day in the Dominion of Canada by Thomas Allen, Ltd., Toronto.*

Library of Congress Catalog

Card Number: 54:10494

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## *Prelude*

THE SUMMER had gone, the voyage was at an end. At Quarantine the reporters had boarded the steamer in pleasing numbers and, although it was still so early in the morning, the scene in the stateroom was both impressive and typical. In the ornate little salon of our suite all Madame's flowers, which had weathered the trip in the darkness of the ship's refrigerator, had been snatched forth and spread about in fading splendor. In the midst of these tributes sat Olive Fremstad in her beautiful new Paris clothes, playing to the hilt a part which she always relished, a part grown familiar by yearly repetition but never stale—the celebrated opera star returning from Europe for her Metropolitan season.

There was the usual passage at arms between the singer and the invading press: they lunging to the attack, she feinting skillfully with mock surprise and dismay. After the sprightly thrust and parry came the inevitable capitulation. Rich copy flowed freely—and so did the best champagne. No one seemed to care that it was barely a little past breakfast time: reporters keep no hours, and the toast they drank to the opening of the new season was supposed to compensate for the strict ban on smoking. Well briefed at the office beforehand, not one reached for so much as a match.

Madame appreciated this. "What nice boys you are, after all!" she told them jovially. "You must come to the opera! Why on earth should those dreadful critics of yours have all the fun? . . . Make a note, Tinka," she added, turning to me where I sat at a desk sorting telegrams, "seats at my first performance for all these nice boys—good seats where they can see me!"

The nice boys chorused their thanks with due show of enthusiasm, but I fancied that one or two of them winked slyly

in my direction, as much as to say: Don't you bother, honey: grand opera's not our dish! They had enjoyed their encounter with Madame, however; they always did. She had a hearty, hail-fellow manner which she reserved especially for them and, spurious though it was, they appreciated the effort and wished her well. They would turn in good stories and she would feel rewarded.

So now that was over and, relaxed for the brief interval before more annoyances might be expected, we stood democratically at the rail with the other passengers watching the maneuvering of the great ship into her pier. Madame regarded the busy, puffing tugboats with approval. Hard work was her religion and she respected it wherever she met it. The work of these tugs, moreover, was quite definitely in her interest.

"Look," she cried, in the best of humors, "look at those queer brown beards the little boats wear on their snouts!"

"Oh," I said, "I think those are called buffers."

"Buf-fers?" It seemed to be a new and puzzling word.

"Yes. They break the force of the bumps, you see—sort of cushion the shocks."

"Aha!" She turned and pierced me with that sharp light of discovery in her eyes which new and profitable ideas always kindled there. "That, Tinka, is exactly what you shall be. I don't need a companion, thank God! And 'secretary' sounds far too important for you. But *buf-fer*—ah, that is quite perfect! From now on, child, that shall be *your* role!"

I accepted the new title in silence. It was certainly apt enough, as the summer with her in Europe had just revealed. But nonetheless, I made a mental reservation that secretary I would be, at least to the general public. I could blushingly imagine, otherwise, my telephone encounters: "Hello! This is Madame Fremstad's buffer speaking." And then the answer, in kindly if impatient tones; "Is big sister at home, sonny?" Life in the singer's household would be complicated enough, I knew, without this farce.

This incident of my investiture took place in the fall of

1911 when Olive Fremstad, for whom I was to buff so long and so diligently, was returning for her ninth season at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. She was then at the very pinnacle of her career, and newspapers of that day—which gave a sensational amount of space to the affairs of opera stars—regarded her with special deference because she was said to be one of the seven highest paid singers in the world. Contemporary appraisal of her as an artist amounted almost to veneration; her scrapbooks contain an amazing collection of press effusions, each one so consistently fervid and ornate with praise that the general tone becomes monotonous. It seems strange that such eulogies should survive only in yellowing books on forgotten shelves; but there is a certain word much overworked in those columns, the misuse of which explains the mystery. That word is “immortal.”

Her admirers liked to think that Olive Fremstad's art, if not the artist herself, would live forever. But they were wrong simply because that honor is not for an interpretive performer. The crown such an artist wears may be bright and shining for a while, but the laurels fastened there are of the quick-wilting variety: overnight they lose their fresh green and turn to a pinch of fragrant and nostalgic dust before you can say “Bravo!” The brilliance, the power, and the glory can be set in no preservative; the luster begins to fade at the moment the last curtain falls. This is the doom of every artist whose immortality is conditioned by mortal memory.

But all of these singers once had their day, and it may even have been the more glorious because so brief. In an era which, it must be remembered, had no radio, no television, and very little Hollywood, the public idol beyond the footlights occupied a unique and enviable position. Opera stars then represented the incarnation of glamour and all their doings were of paramount importance. But they enjoyed a romantic apartness hard to reconcile with today's casual and chummy attitude toward its entertainers, and were fully conscious of their own prestige and went to endless trouble to maintain it.

Although much in demand by lion huntresses of the period, they were difficult (and very expensive) to snare. They cherished their precious isolation and, especially during the opera season, made appearances, entrances, and exits like royalty, discreetly avoiding the public eye when not fully prepared to be recognized and observed. Emma Eames, at the age of eighty-five, commented upon this with melancholy perception, in the last interview she ever gave:

"The wonderful aloofness of the old régime is gone," she said. "There had been an atmosphere of poetry and mystery about us all, but that has ended. . . . What do you suppose would have happened to the Greek Augurs if they had not been left behind their screens?"

A glance over the world of opera and theater today answers Madame Eames's question and confirms her sense of loss. The illusion has vanished and with it the glamour. There is no such thing as *Grand Opera* any more.

During her eleven seasons at the Metropolitan, Olive Fremstad rose to eminence on a crescendo of public acclaim which professed to find everything about her, from her Wagnerian interpretations to the menu of her Sunday dinner, worth talking about. Her abrupt effacement at the end, though partially self-imposed, was the more extraordinary because of the loud fanfare which had accompanied her entire career. No curtain ever descended with greater finality; no artist ever retired to the sound of more woeful lamentations or was more quickly forgotten by all but a faithful few. This was the price she had to pay, perhaps, for her persistent indulgence of a natural instinct for solitude and escape. Although she learned the tricks of the trade and practiced them when she had to, her heart and mind strove together toward one end only—the cultivation of her art. Hers was a flaming and highly individual talent; her personality was colorful, brilliant, and bizarre; her physical beauty was striking; and she had enormous intelligence as well as charm. She was the peer of any artist who ever sang at the Metropolitan and was emphatically the greatest dramatic tra-



gedienne who ever appeared there. But frustration dogged her footsteps all her life. Possibly her ideals were too lofty; perhaps she worked too hard and sacrificed too many of her human needs; certainly she was too preoccupied to give much thought to her niche in history. Nevertheless, in so far as any interpretive artist can claim the title, she was an authentic genius.

I was to know Olive Fremstad long and to know her well; perhaps a little better in most ways than anyone else ever did—or so she said. What I have written of her in this book is all true. Everything happened exactly as I have told it; nothing has been added. The events of the seven years have been compressed a little here and there of necessity, but nothing significant has been omitted. Not all conversations can be remembered verbatim, of course, but their flavor, content, and style are recalled clearly enough to be honest. Whatever in this record occurred before my time was either described to me by Fremstad herself, by old friends or members of her family, or has been taken from accounts in the press, from personal letters, and diaries.

It must not be forgotten, however, that all these impressions were received through the eyes, ears, and heart of a young girl; a girl impossible to compare with her modern counterpart because the influences which surrounded her, which bore upon her personality and aroused her enthusiasms, have virtually disappeared from today's world. I am very thankful to have been that young person; the experience proved to be a better education than I might have found in college and a privilege far greater than I could possibly have deserved.



## *Chapter 1*

DURING my first years with Madame Fremstad she was at frequent pains to remind me that who I was and whence I came were of no possible importance once I had become her buffer. I never argued the point but I never really agreed. The only daughter of an Episcopalian clergyman, reared in a provincial town of northern Vermont . . . what on earth was I doing suddenly transplanted to the front porch of Walhalla? Often, as I trailed dutifully along behind the operatic gods and goddesses up the arc of the Rainbow Bridge, I felt a long way from home. But in that distance lay much of the enchantment.

In order to understand just why the whole thing seemed such a miracle to me then—and still does, in spite of some frayed illusions—it is permissible, I think, to flout Madame Fremstad's opinion and peer for a moment through the windows of the old rectory at the life which went on there. In view of what was to happen, the most surprising aspect of that life would seem to be the almost total absence of music during my formative years. Although a piano was a normal part of our back-parlor furniture, it was often silent and neglected. Once a week my father picked out with two fingers the hymn tunes for Sunday; and, even less frequently, Mother was moved to tinkle a faultily remembered page or two from the works of Chaminade or Sinding, over which she had struggled in girlhood. I could not play at all for, curiously enough, I was never required as were the other girls I knew, to "take" (the process of piano instruction as referred to in Vermont) from any of the genteel ladies who gave lessons in our town.

My musical activities, if such they may be called, were only two. Although I had almost no voice, I was expected to sing in the church choir and meekly did so—the rector's daughter a

sort of decoy duck, I suppose, for volunteers more melodiously endowed. I also joined the high school mandolin club, attracted to it chiefly I fear, by the social pleasures the membership enjoyed. I certainly performed with little enough skill.

Had Mother not grown up in New York and in her youth been taken to concerts and opera, I would scarcely have known that these existed. But she always had such a passionate interest in people that the personalities of famous artists obsessed her far more than their works. She loved to read and talk about their doings, and so their names, if nothing more, became familiar to me. There were two little hand-colored photographs hanging on the wall of the rectory parlor looking, I always thought, strangely ill at ease. One of them showed Emma Calvé, rose in teeth, as a much too coquettish Carmen; the other was a plump and stately Elsa as portrayed by Emma Eames. These always fascinated me. Although I was no singer and had no ambition to become one, I used to study the portraits curiously and try to imagine what the glorious sounds were like which were said to issue from between those painted lips. For many years I never came closer to grand opera than this, nor ever expected to. The choir, the club, the little pictures, bounded my musical horizon satisfactorily until that wonderful day when my grandmother's gift of a pianola arrived to change everything.

When the ebony monstrosity was trundled between our comfortable Morris chair and the mission table to its appointed place, Mother threatened to have hysterics, for the symmetry of her cherished "piano corner" was ruined. The subsequent arrival of a large cabinet containing sixty-nine perforated rolls of "Selections from the World's Best Music" sent her fleeing to an upstairs sitting room. There she entertained her callers or sat with Father of an evening while down below, indifferent to my surroundings, I made my first exciting excursions into the world of the great composers. That few of them would have recognized their own brain children under my ministrations, I was blissfully unaware.

Left to myself, I acquired in no time an astonishing mastery over my clumsy instrument, and was as pleased as if I controlled a symphony orchestra. Soon I was on familiar terms with all sixty-nine of the "selections" and had developed in the process a technique which made me, in my own estimation at least, something of a virtuosa. I discovered that by throwing my weight violently about and varying the pressure of toe on pedal I could obtain some rather hair-raising effects, which I so fancied that at the parish socials which took place in the rectory parlors I needed almost no urging to perform. I had great, if undeserved success with my moving rendition (*moving* is the *mot juste*!) of Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata, and my stirring "Soldiers' Chorus" from *Faust*, while my execution (another all-too-descriptive word!) of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* Minuet became standard to an audience which knew no other.

But I never felt the faintest urge to play independently; the road was too long and I too impatient of results. My sessions with the pianola did, however, convince me that there were paths of glory in this life which I had never suspected and which I might never hope to tread. I became brooding, and difficult to live with, and for a time there was a troubled silence in the back parlor.

My grandmother's next gift, a wooden Victrola, did much to console me and I began feverishly to collect "Red Seal" records. These were almost exclusively Verdi, Donizetti and Gounod, because Father, who paid for them, insisted that music, to be enjoyable, must have above all else *tunes*. The voices of the singers, dreamlike and beautiful in spite of the primitive method of recording, affected me strangely; I now entered another world altogether. I no longer passed the dark winter afternoons after school on the skating pond, but in the local music shop where I sat glassy-eyed and inert, drinking in the fabulous sounds of opera from each new issue of records. I became a nuisance to the clerks and a riddle to my schoolmates, who tittered and winked and thought me queer because I showed no interest in the favorites which they played at another

counter—"The Shade of the Old Apple Tree" and "Alexander's Ragtime Band."

Further benefits were soon on the way from my culture-determined grandparent. Early in the autumn following my graduation from high school I was shipped off to New York to be "finished"; and, having no particular talents, amused myself as did most young girls then, as they waited impatiently for marriage, by studying "Art." At the Art Students League on Fifty-seventh Street I applied myself with no very great enthusiasm to crayons, brushes, and canvas; and on Saturday afternoons and occasional evenings—as often as the state of my allowance permitted—I explored the much more fascinating activities of the music theater.

The Golden Age of Opera had already begun to tarnish a little around the edges at that time. Eames, Sembrich, Nordica, and Plançon had left the Metropolitan but there was still Caruso, Scotti, and Chaliapin; Farrar, Destinn, Hempel and Olive Fremstad, while at the Manhattan Mr. Hammerstein's galaxy included the unique Mary Garden. Now I saw and heard in the flesh (all too solid, in most cases) those Olympians whose disembodied voices had so charmed me in Victrola days; and I suffered, oddly enough, no disillusionment. The opera became an obsession; I found there everything my imagination craved. So I diligently read libretti, pasted up scrapbooks, visited record shops, hoarding my allowance toward this interest and no other. The standees' rail was my accustomed place at the opera, but that discouraged me not at all; I was young and sturdy of foot. Besides, when the house darkened and the golden curtains parted, I was all eyes and ears; feet were forgotten.

To my own surprise and the grudging admiration of my fellow art-students, I presently discovered that I liked Wagner. In fact, as I sampled one after the other of his works—beginning easily with *Lohengrin* and plunging on with ever-increasing excitement through *Tristan* and *Parsifal*—I found that I liked little else.

In the natural course of events—and by this time considered

quite mad by my contemporaries—I decided to attend a matinee cycle of the entire Ring of the Nibelungen. At the second performance, *Die Walküre* (which I was now hearing for the third time) there was an innovation in casting. Johanna Gadski, the usual Brünnhilde, whose staid and cautious deportment and unbecoming tight metal corset had much upset my notions of a romantic Wish-Maiden, was not singing. Berta Morena was the Sieglinde, and Olive Fremstad, already one of my special favorites, was cast as Brünnhilde. It was her debut in the role, and there was a pleasant stir of expectancy in the house as the conductor, Alfred Hertz, climbed to his stool and began the brief, exuberant *Vorspiel* which raises the curtain on Act II. There was more than the usual applause when the stage picture was revealed, for such a Brünnhilde as no Metropolitan audience had ever seen before stood poised on the rocks above her parent Wotan, laughing and exultant. The toss of her head was wild and free, and girlish mischief shone in her eyes.

In her youth Fremstad also had been tortured by the steel bodices of Bayreuth and apparently was now determined to flout tradition and the possible disapproval of Cosima Wagner, who still ruled, to some extent, her husband's works on both sides of the Atlantic. This new Brünnhilde required something a little more suitable for an athletic young goddess whose common means of transportation was a winged horse, and whose arms must be free for spear and shield, and for slinging across her saddlebow the slain heroes from the battlefield. In connivance with Professor Roller, Chief Designer of the Court Opera in Vienna (and in his line, a genius comparable to herself), she had evolved an outfit for the warrior maiden which even the leading seamstresses of Walhalla itself could not have improved upon. At one glance the whole familiar scene was lifted into the realm of the highest poetic imagination.

Fremstad was not then slim and slight, although she contrived to give that impression whenever she wished; neither was she large and heroic as most people thought. She was of ordinary size except for a thickness of diaphragm which she

once explained by saying—with as near an approach to the vulgar as she ever permitted herself—"That is my *bellows*, I'd have you know, not my *belly*!" She had, however, admirably molded hips, thighs, and ankles as the new costume plainly revealed. She had reduced the old armored corset to a mere bandeau slung to her shoulders with leather straps; more of these straps made her girdle, in which her gray-white kirtle was caught up out of her equestrian way. From her waist, to give variety and brilliance to her movements, swung a series of copper disks and triangles which caught the glint of the foot-lights. Her cloak, clasped with polished steel, was gray, the color of the clouds where she was most at home. Her sandals were heelless (a striking innovation) and her handsome legs were crosshatched with leather thongs. On her dark red hair, short and wind-tossed, was a white-winged helmet, a wreath of the traditional oak leaves softening its line across her brow.\*

I have described this costume in detail because it is presently to become so important in this story. It was certainly something to study with wonder and delight. The pattering of appreciation on this occasion lasted through most of Wotan's opening remarks and took the edge off her first *Ho-jo-to-ho* which, because she was very nervous, was not, I reluctantly decided, quite as brilliant as Gadske's brassy shout. She recovered herself rapidly however, and her playful mockery of Fricka brought another round of applause.

I found it exceedingly difficult to focus this lively Brünnhilde in the long-range binoculars which were my constant companion at the standees' rail. She leaped about on the painted canvas rocks as swiftly and surely as if they were granite and the wind seemed to blow through all her movements. When, overcome by filial sympathy, she flung down her weapons and sprang to Wotan's knee, her gesture had such enthusiasm that the spear broke neatly in two. This was a near disaster, as the *Todesverkündigung* scene was soon due. Before she disappeared into the cave, however, she resourcefully

\* This costume is preserved in the Museum of the City of New York.



grasped both broken pieces in one hand, and of course when she emerged again the haft had been magically repaired. But what she said to the armorer, who stood bristling with substitute weapons in the wings, is quoted behind the scenes to this day.

The performance progressed in ever-increasing splendor that afternoon. At the close Louise Homer, Morena and Fremstad, an impressive trio of goddesses, bowed before the curtain and with dazzling smiles accepted their enormous sheaves of American Beauty roses, outwardly gracious but inwardly, one suspected, keeping careful tally of how many each other received. Those long-stemmed, and now almost-obsolete magenta blossoms embellished the chief entr'acte diversion at the opera at that time, and the elaborate presentation maneuvers became known as *La bataille des fleurs*. This involved a certain amount of audience participation in the form of contending applause for favorites and became, eventually, so corrupt in practice that it was officially abandoned.

When I faced my easel at school next morning I was obsessed with but one idea—to capture something of yesterday's magic on paper. Defeated before I even started, my artless attempt to evoke for myself the image of the Fremstad Valkyrie did afford my excitement some relief. I worked on my frustrating sketch of her for a week or more, and in the meantime heard my first *Siegfried* (Gadski, much to my regret, as Brünnhilde); and finally the last of the trilogy, *Götterdämmerung* (with Fremstad again, much to my joy).

This opera was long but I hung loyally on the rail until the final note. The whole audience went quite mad, pounding the aging red plush seats with fists and canes, tossing down snowfalls of torn programs and screaming like a football crowd with enthusiasm. I joyfully added my light soprano squeal to the din, eventually wending my way toward my boardinghouse in a state of smug satisfaction. I felt as if Fremstad's triumph that day had been in some strange way my own as well. I do not believe in premonitions: I heard no "thunder on the left." I

was simply gratified to observe that the general public had so emphatically endorsed my choice of a favorite opera singer. Because I had stared at my heroine so long and so devotedly through the binoculars all afternoon, I thought that I should try to make a few quick alterations on my sketch of her before the impression faded. So I stopped off at the school and labored in frenzied concentration until the last evening classes were over and the lights out. I felt I had much improved the resemblance and, well pleased with myself, finished and signed my work and went home to bed.

In class the following day I needed very little urging to display my masterpiece which, I humbly recall, met with instant, if biased applause, all with one voice urging me to send my portrait to the singer.

"Oh, I couldn't *dream* of such an idea!" I protested. But I did dream of it; I took the sketch home and meditated long upon its dubious virtues. It seemed to glow and take life before my eyes and I wondered how I had ever been so clever. Boldly now, I made my decision. On my very best paper I composed and discarded a dozen notes until I was satisfied with one, then dashed to the corner mailbox before I lost courage. Of course the moment the letter flopped down from sight my heart sank with it. That Madame Fremstad would ever bother to read it seemed highly unlikely—to expect an answer was sheer presumption.

Nevertheless, on the Monday following, I found beside my plate at breakfast a letter addressed in a dashing, heavy script which could be Fremstad's and no other's. It was the writing of a strong-minded woman constantly harried into signing contracts, autographing pictures, answering appeals—and never exactly sure in just which of her many languages she wrote. Before I opened the thick blue envelope I was forlornly certain of what I should find within: a gracious regret if not a peremptory refusal. But no indeed—Madame Olive Fremstad had personally taken her pen in hand to say: "I would love to see

your sketch. Can you bring it to me on Monday afternoon at three?"

I was stunned and speechless with joy. How could such a fantastic thing be happening to me? (I still ask this. When I became Madame's buffer, part of the job was to ward off just such importunists as myself. Moreover, I discovered packets of such requests, outdated and forgotten, which she had never even thought of answering!)

I read the letter six or seven times and then I did what today would be called a "double take." Monday . . . but *this* was Monday, and it was nine o'clock already! I dashed down to the school, told my exciting news with pardonable flourish, and signed off for the day. Pausing at a florist's on my way home I spent the last of my current allowance on a trio of gardenias which I dispatched to Madame's hotel, with a card assuring her that I would be only too happy (absurd understatement!) to keep the appointment. I then returned to my room and, obeying some obscure and primal instinct, took a perfumed bath, manicured and shampooed myself to a high degree of elegance, and dressed myself in my Sunday best. Then, with folded hands, I sat down to wait, in prayer and meditation, my hour of glory. I felt like a medieval esquire in vigil on the eve of knighthood. I was a foolish and star-struck girl, but I had a vague and disturbing sense of fate in operation, and wished to meet it in a state of grace.

After lunch, which seemed to me a coarse and unworthy interruption of my dedicated mood, I experienced some slight misgivings. I took up my sketch for wrapping and thoughtfully contemplated it for the last time. Then suddenly I knew! It was no good—it was, in fact, terrible: stiff—amateurish—flat and lifeless! A child could do better! I swooned with humiliation, knowing myself clearly now for an impostor, a mere sensation seeker. Madame would see through me at once and very properly order me from her presence. After this fiasco I could never presume to draw another line. Worse still, I could never enjoy

another opera! Nothing was left me but to return abjectly to Vermont and plunge, for solace, into good deeds: for me there could be no future. But eventually I washed the tears from my face, drank a glass of water, and squared my shoulders. After all, wasn't it a little too late and rather rude to retreat now? So I decided—as I had known all along that I would—to see it through. I would have at least something to remember during the long empty years ahead!

## Chapter 2

TWO FORTY-FIVE found me in the lobby of the Hotel Ansonia which was at that time a sort of aviary for opera singers. Madame Fremstad, a whimsical gleam in her eye, once explained to an inquiring reporter her own reasons for this choice of residence. She said she liked its proximity to the Hudson River, so that she might indulge her favorite pastime of *catching eels*! The reporter quoted this preposterous statement in his paper, and a score of others throughout the country copied and embroidered it. But it always seemed to me as good an answer as any to a thoughtless question. It is true that as a child in Norway, Madame's little blond pigtails were bound with dried eel-skins, at least she always said so; but I doubt if she ever went out of her way to meet an eel personally at any later date—certainly not on Riverside Drive.

So I sat watching the clock and clutching my flat package. At two fifty-eight I went to the desk and with a terrific effort at nonchalance, invited the clerk to announce me. Perhaps I half expected to be challenged by a flash of Magic Fire, or by the orchestral crash of a *Leitmotiv*, but I received a distinct shock when I heard the clerk say "Fremstad?" just as he might have said "Jones" or "Murgatroyd," "1102 . . . who is calling?"

For a blank moment I could not remember who was, so unlike myself I felt, but I must have given the proper password for presently I was in an elevator ascending far too fast for my composure. Then a walk down an ordinary hotel corridor—a halt at an ordinary brown door—and a shy thumb upon a bell! I drew a long breath and shook the mists from my eyes. A patter of nervous feet could be heard coming toward me, which I knew instinctively to be no Wagnerian tread; and then the door was opened by a pale, distraught-looking maid, whose bosom bristled with pins in alarming fashion. She stared at me thoughtfully. “Madame is a little busy,” she said in sad Central European accents, “please to wait in here.”

It was a funny little parlor. I have always wanted to reproduce it intact on some appropriate stage or movie set. A large bay window looked over the eel-infested Hudson, and in its curve stood an enormous silver bugle holding a lavish offering of tall American Beauties. Attached to one of the stems was a knot of broad red, white, and blue ribbon on which were emblazoned German words in raised gold lettering. I noticed a chaise-longue with a leopard skin flung over it; and nearby, a card table littered with newspaper clippings, paste pot, scissors, and a large, tattered scrapbook. The piano, draped in a magnificent Spanish shawl, stood a little apart, near another window. There was a score of *Tannhäuser* on the music rack, open at Act II, while on the floor beneath stood a statuette of the Winged Victory, as if it had just been casually dropped there because it interfered with something. On the widest of the walls was hung a dashing, life-sized painting of Carmen wearing the piano cover but looking very little like any Fremstad I had ever seen. A flock of small signed pictures hung below it, and beyond the door was a half-filled bookcase. Just above this I noticed a picture I was later to know very well indeed because it traveled everywhere with us in something called the “homelike trunk.” It was a sad-colored drawing of a dark and empty sea, with a shepherd piping on ruined castle walls—Kareol, and the last act of *Tristan und Isolde*. On the

margin had been drawn a bar of music—the plaintive notes of waiting.

I was examining it respectfully when there was a stir and flurry behind a closed door. It opened a crack only and I had a fleeting vision of a broad face and a pile of curls, while a voice like an oboe said matter-of-factly, "Patience, child, I'll be there in a minute!" The child almost stopped breathing. The Diva!

The next manifestation was equally startling. This time the door flew wide and there entered an odd little procession. First Madame Olive Fremstad, easily recognizable now, with her swinging step, her tragic eyebrows, the toss of her restless head. She was dressed—or rather, partially dressed—in several yards of dotted blue foulard, a floating end of which was clutched in the frantic hands of the maid who scrambled after her. Behind them came another woman, small, desperate, bristling with still more pins, and tangled in tape measures and coils of lace. "*Aber bitte, bitte, Gnä Frau!*" she pleaded and fell on her quaking knees to adjust a hemline.

Madame Fremstad ignored everyone but me, her guest. This was an admirable habit which she had taught herself, and very ingratiating it always proved to an audience of either one or a thousand. "Why, you're just a baby!" she exclaimed, grasping my shoulders in a powerful grip and turning me to the light. "Thin as a *Backfisch* too! You probably don't eat the right things! Now quick, let me see the picture!"

While I was fumbling with the string of the package she gave her attention briefly again to the two women, now both suppliant before her trying to attach the yardage in folds to her waist. "*Na, freilich!*" she exclaimed with pleasure. "That is much better—although I should have preferred a *rédingote* or a—!" Suddenly without warning, a clap of thunder seemed to rock the room and lightnings flashed from Madame's eyes upon the cowering seamstress. "You have pricked *my meat!*" she accused her, indicating the spot with a tense forefinger. "Thank you so much! Now get out of here, both of you, and leave us in peace!"

The women scurried from sight and the diva tossed a tail of material over one shoulder like a mantle and sank breathless into a chair. "I lead the most terrible life," she told me, "I can't even get a simple little spring frock made without bloodshed. I'm not like other people!"

"Of course you're not, Madame Fremstad," I murmured, hoping to make it sound like a compliment. This was lost on her.

"But *you* are—" she said reproachfully, "as like every other American girl as a pea in a pod. Tell me, what does it feel like?"

Answering this question was difficult. I stammered a little. "I . . . I'm afraid it's pretty boring, really."

"Aha!" she laughed—and it sounded like an orchestral *tutti*—"You should be around me for a while and you would never be bored. That I can guarantee you!"

I was groping for the right thing to say to this when she caught sight of my drawing which I was rolling and unrolling. Suddenly she was all warmth and sympathy. "Why child, you are nervous, naturally! Well, let me look at it!"

She snatched it from my paralyzed fingers and took it over to the window. For a moment she studied it closely and in silence. Then she tossed it on the piano and bent a quizzical eyebrow in my direction. "So that is how I look to you!"

"Oh Madame," I cried, feeling disgracefully near tears, "you don't, of course. I know it's awful . . . I shouldn't have dared bring it! I guess I just wanted to meet you . . . I've admired you so much . . . I thought . . ."

"You mean that you *didn't* think, don't you?" She smiled sweetly into my eyes. "Well, cheer up, it isn't as bad as that! You probably have some talent. If you work hard you'll find out soon enough. Work, child, and then more work! That is all there is to it!"

I put out my hand for the drawing; it should afflict her no more! "No," she boomed, "I shall keep it; but now I shall give you something a little more like me."

To my astonishment she bent over a large scrap basket and retrieved from it a photograph of herself in the identical cos-

tume and almost the same pose. It appeared to be the sole survivor of a dozen or more which had been flung there, angrily torn to shreds. She dusted it off with the end of her foulard. "Taken on the stage when I was worn out, of course!" she explained bitterly. She breathed on it with care and reached for a pen. *Ho-jo-to-ho!* she wrote, and added the inimitable signature I had first seen that morning.

"Oh please, would you mind putting *my* name on it somewhere?" I ventured to suggest.

"Of course, if you really want it. But it is such a funny name!"

I was surprised. "It is?" Watkins had always seemed to me a very ordinary name indeed.

Again her laughter rattled the windowpanes. "The funniest name I ever heard!" she assured me, even while inscribing it across her sandaled feet in the picture. "But when I know you better I shall call you Tinka—Matinka!"

I felt suddenly a great, inexplicable happiness, but I could think of nothing more inspired to say than "What does it mean?"

"It is your first name—Mary—in *my* language."

"In Norwegian?" I asked, sensibly enough.

"Oh God!" she cried, appealing to the Deity with a shrug and cast-up eyes. "Has she no imagination?"

I never inquired again. I considered Tinka a delightful nickname; and from that time on most people thought I had no other.

"But now you must run along!" Madame said abruptly, picking up my coat and putting it firmly over my arm. She swept me briskly down the hall. "My accompanist will be here in a minute," she warned me, "I like you, my *lilla* Matinka! Come and see me after the first act Saturday night in my dressing room, if you wish. I'm doing the Venus again, of course. But I am to have the Elisabeth on tour and she is splendid for me!"

This last was confided in a dramatic whisper and I felt enormously flattered to think that she had entrusted me with



such a secret, even though she had, it transpired, given it to the Sunday music columns that very morning. As we reached the outer door, a gray, agitated little man with a briefcase clutched against his chest was just issuing from the elevator.

Madame beckoned to him. "Come on—come on; you're already late!" Then remembering me once more, she waved a friendly hand. "Don't forget, Matinka," she called to me, "*work! Work like a tiger!*"

I meditated upon this fierce animal as the elevator carried me away, and decided that if a tiger ever did any work, he would work like Olive Fremstad.

This interview had a somewhat unworthy aftermath. My whole circle of everyday acquaintances now became extremely distasteful to me except during those moments when I could persuade them to listen to my repetitious accounts of the Ansonia adventure. How distasteful I became to them is humiliating to think! At any rate, I existed in a state of suspended animation, combined with great irritability, until the following Saturday when I duly attended the *Tannhäuser* performance.

Olive Fremstad sat there on her Venusberg couch—in that classic pose she later told me she had copied from a statue in the Vatican—and spread her blandishments with the usual skill before some callous tenor who, of course, did not exist for me. I now had a sort of proprietary interest in this goddess and I listened to and watched her with jealous attention. Her performance was, as usual, superb. Venus was always one of her greatest impersonations, and at every repetition, some wit in the audience would inevitably mutter to his companion, commenting on the infidelity of the minstrel knight: "Fat-headed fool! You wouldn't catch *me* leaving that girl behind!"

That evening, as I examined her microscopically through my glasses, I thought that Madame Fremstad moistened her lips rather often and generally seemed tense and nervous. Perhaps, in fastening her rosy draperies some awkward dresser had again

"pricked her meat." Perhaps—desperate thought—she was ill and so might refuse to receive me! It never occurred to me how difficult it was to sit quietly there on the couch throughout that eternal ballet, with nothing to do but look arch and seductive in the grand style; the voice meanwhile stiffening in the throat. I was to hear this ordeal described often enough in years to come.

When the curtain eventually fell and the singers came before the footlights—Madame less unreal but even more beautiful as she bowed beside the stuffy Landgraf and the obese Tannhäuser—my heart leaped, for this was *my* cue. I looked down with compassion upon my neighbors over whose feet it became necessary to crawl (for in honor of this event I had committed the extravagance of an orchestra seat). What poor earth-bound mortals these people were, sitting there with expressions of annoyance while I progressed, although clumsily, toward Olympus!

I cannot remember how I got to or through the stage door; but apparently there were no obstacles. Mr. John Edgar, the classic doorman who, in his frock coat and enormous Stetson, looked remarkably like Buffalo Bill, shepherded me through a swinging gate, past a knot of Wartburg retainers in full costume, who were anachronistically smoking and reading the evening papers. Beyond was a bare and ugly passage flanked by two rows of closed doors and pervaded by strong odors of paint and disinfectant. Over the transom of No. 10, the stellar dressing room, streamed light and a powerful soprano voice negotiating a scale. I looked at my guide in sudden alarm, for those were not Fremstad's tones. "Oh," he said, "*she's* in No. 11 to-night. Seems foolish, but Elisabeth gets top billing in this show." He proceeded to the next door and knocked with great flourish.

The maid of the Ansonia, still bristling with pins, answered and actually ventured a little smile. "Good evening, Fräulein," she said in the cautious whisper of one conspirator to another, and motioned me within.

Once more I should have liked to preserve for future stage or screen museums the scene upon which I now entered. Although I could have had no premonition concerning it, this was the last time I was ever to see an operatic star's dressing room from the layman's point of view: henceforth much of my life was to be lived in this one or its counterpart. It seemed very wonderful to me, exactly right in every detail.

The singer was reclining upon a sofa which, except for the absence of tinsel and paper roses, was not unlike the one she had so recently occupied in the Venusberg. She was in wig, costume, and full make-up, but was muffled to the eyes in a sort of burnoose of soft white cashmere. Fierce lights burned everywhere and enormous mirrors multiplied them and increased their glare. The heat, the tension in the air, the scent of the five great bouquets which Madame had just received before the curtain, the indescribable fragrance of grease paint, powder, and candlewick, were almost overpowering.

On the floor by the couch lay a white bearskin rug and around its edge stood a small group of men and women attired in the exaggerated elegance which was then *de rigueur* for attending the opera. Their faces looked pale and blank in the bright glare which was so becoming to the painted Venus. They laughed and twittered and fidgeted about their wonderful darling, who lay there regarding them solemnly through the ridiculous length of her beaded lashes. In one hand she held a single long-stemmed rose with which she beat a nervous rhythm to the rise and fall of their voices.

Suddenly the maid, hovering over the littered dressing table, caught up an atomizer and handed it to her mistress who, to my surprise, did not direct its stream toward her own throat or person but, like a burst of machine-gun fire, straight at the phalanx of visitors. Everyone jumped, screamed, and laughed too loudly, calling her reproachfully their "Wild Olive!" She crinkled her eyes a little with laughter too, hissed in a raucous whisper the one word "Germs!" and retired into the folds of her shawl again.

She was reaching up to fasten her rose into the lapel of a stout, bearded gentleman whom she called Charlie, when she suddenly caught sight of me in my corner, feeling and doubtless looking like a frightened little rabbit. "Why, it's Matinka!" she cried, forgetting to whisper. "Come over here, child, and meet my friends!" She held out a hand that was hot and dry, the skin stiff with liquid powder. "This is little Miss *Watkins*!"

She glanced around brightly, as if seeking appreciation of this convulsingly funny name, but like myself, no one saw the joke. They smiled politely but with no very great interest. "She is an artist—or wants to be," explained Madame. "A very nice child!"

"Very young—very sweet!" said Charlie gallantly; then turning to the singer again, he cried, "But my God, Olive, you should have seen yourself at that age! What a little beauty—what a witch! You were divine, my dear—you were delicious—you were edible!"

Madame puffed out her rouged cheeks and let her breath explode. "For heaven's sake, Charlie, you are not supposed to remember that far back!"

A chorus of bells now began ringing outside. "Go!" said Fremstad to the group in general. "You mustn't miss her entrance—and I want to know how she sings the prayer too. Call me tomorrow!"

There was hand-kissing then and more laughter as they all filed out. I approached the couch timidly. "Good-by, Madame," I said, "and thank you for letting me come!" This sounded so dull, in view of the event, that I was moved to add somewhat gratuitously, "And I think that you sang perfectly beautifully!"

Fremstad shook her head and the tragic brows climbed. "Well you are wrong, Matinka." She sighed. "I was not in voice!"

She waved me away and shifted her draperies. Then suddenly she pulled me back and touched my big fox collar with her chalky hand. "How can you afford such a beautiful fur?" she asked. "Are you rich?"

"Oh no! My father is just a minister, away up north. We go

over to Montreal sometimes to shop, and such things are cheap there."

"Well now, that is extraordinary!" exclaimed Madame, swinging her sandaled feet to the rug. "The company is going to Montreal next month! That is where I'm to sing the Elisabeth. You shall come there too, Matinka, and we will go shopping together. Now don't forget, will you?"

"Oh, Madame Fremstad—I'll be there if I have to walk every step!" I burbled as I swam giddily through the lights and scents toward the door. Madame cleared her throat huskily and sent up a little trial note or two as the maid escorted me into the corridor once more.

I duly returned to my expensive seat, but of the *Sängerfest* in the Wartburg that night I remember nothing at all. After Venus had made her brief appearance in Act III to sing *Willkommen, ungetreuer Mann*, the opera was over for me; and to the further annoyance of my neighbors, I soon made my departure. My objective was again the stage door, but this time I was content to stand humbly on the sidewalk with the other Fremstad fans for a final glimpse of her leaving the theater. But quick as I was, Madame was quicker. A passer-by informed me that her car had rolled away just before I reached the spot. But how was that possible? I wondered . . . she had only just left the stage!

Next season I would know all the answers. In this final apparition, Venus was fully dressed for the street. Under the pink chiffon drapery would be a tailored suit and button shoes. Then off with the wig, on with hat and veil! "Good night all!" And away toward home and supper!

## Chapter 3

THE RENDEZVOUS in Montreal actually took place. I had returned to rectory life at Eastertime, and I might never have devoted a single hour to art, for all the good my lessons did me. My parents were quick to remark this and heaved great sighs when once more the pianola and the Victrola were overworked. Having purchased one of the Fremstad records, I now refused to have it played, for in my opinion it fell so far short of the quality in that voice which I so fondly remembered. No one could possibly understand my erratic behavior as I listened carpingly to other singers, moped about, and brooded over my newly purchased scores of *Tannhäuser* and *Die Walküre*. I stared with renewed interest at my old friends, the Carmen and Elsa portraits; and spent my last dollar on a silver frame for my stage photograph of Brünnhilde, which I placed prominently on the piano. I must have been very trying to live with in those days and I am sure my mother's impatience was well justified when she said, "You act most of the time as if you were not here at all. Do try to snap out of it, dear!"

In the mistaken hope of restoring me to normal spirits, consent was given to the Montreal trip; and my grandfather, who was visiting us at the time, offered to accompany me, paying all expenses. By this innocent and kindly gesture he promoted, indirectly, a crisis in our lives which the wildest imagination could not have invented.

In order to attend an evening performance in Montreal it was necessary to spend the night there, hence Grandfather's offer. So on a given afternoon we duly entrained for the short journey across the border and put up at the Windsor Hotel, then the city's best and likely to be, I hoped, the choice of the opera stars.

I was right. On our return from buying our seats I was certain that I saw Madame Fremstad coming through the lobby swathed in voluminous furs and with the pinkest of outdoor cheeks. The crisp Canadian air must have lured her, a true daughter of the North, into the wintry streets even on this anxious day when her Elisabeth was to be born. We heard her deep voice asking the clerk at the desk to pay for her cab, adding with such a playful air that I wondered for a moment if it were really she, "I hope that my credit is good!" She did not glance in our direction and I made no move. In another second the lift had whisked her from sight.

When next we saw her, she was a medieval saint in blond plaits, spiked crown and wimple, a long golden train falling heavily from jeweled clasps on her shoulders. So young, so frail, so virginal, and so ecstatic did she appear as she made her sweeping entrance under the canvas arches of the castle hall, that even my grandfather (who was also a clergyman and skeptical about all women of the theater) sat up as if he smelled smoke, and reached for my binoculars.

During the first act I had been visibly suffering and throwing myself about in my seat. Another soprano had been cast as Venus, one who was evidently considered by a thrifty management to be good enough for the road. But quite unreasonably I resented her presence on Fremstad's rose-bowered throne and even refused to applaud the poor woman. I told my grandfather that only now was it possible to understand Tannhäuser's defection to the upper world. He smiled genially at what he supposed to be my original wit, and rewarded me with a lemonade during the entr'acte.

Incidentally, Olive Fremstad herself once solemnly told the press that because the theme of this opera is Sacred and Profane Love, both female roles should be sung by the same woman. "I could do it very well, too!" she declared. To make good her claim, she actually proposed this, half in earnest, to Gatti-Casazza. She added, magnanimously, that in case the management objected to paying two cachets to one singer, she

would do the Shepherd Lad too, and for nothing. To achieve this latter transformation during the few measures the music provides would certainly be a formidable experience for whoever might be assisting her to change—probably me! Mr. Gatti never took her up on the proposition; it would have been a stunt, of course, but a bargain which should have appealed to him.

Olive Fremstad was a radiantly lovely and touching Elisabeth. Naturally my judgment about such things was valueless then; I based my criticisms solely upon my emotional reactions. Nevertheless, I frankly preferred her more robust impersonations, both then and later, to this pious prig, even though she made her Elisabeth so rapturous and so tenderly human. However, her prayer in the last act, and her desperate searching into the faces of the returning pilgrims, gripped the heart with pity, and I was gratified to detect much sympathetic blowing of noses in the audience.

Madame Fremstad took no curtain calls at the close that night. Although I dragged my poor grandfather through a chill drizzle around to the stage door, her dressing room was dark. "Sorry, miss," said the doorkeeper. "Gone already this 'alf hour, Madam is. Wanted her supper, likely!"

My heart sank dismally. Although I had sent a note around to say we were there, she had not even left me a message! So we returned drearily to the hotel and to bed. At one o'clock next day we must take the train back to Vermont. I almost wished that I had not come.

I was awakened next morning at nine by the tinkling of the telephone on my wall. A plaintive, heavily accented voice, which sounded vaguely familiar, inquired if this was Fräulein Watson. I thought, to avoid argument, I should say yes; and was thereupon overjoyed to hear the receiver being snatched away and a deep, sleepy drawl saluting me: "Hello, Matinka!



Have you had breakfast yet? Well, suppose you come up and have it here with me."

I sprang like a fireman into my clothes. I knew quite well that I had arranged to meet Grandfather in the dining room about this time, but any concern I might well have felt for how long the poor man would wait or how cold his coffee might become, perished stillborn. He was only the first of many sacrificial victims to be offered on the altar of my new life.

In a large room from which the sunlight was excluded, Madame Fremstad was sitting up in an enormous brass bed. Her head, looking unusually small and sleek, was bound, gypsy fashion, in a dark silk scarf, and the white shawl of the dressing room enveloped her shoulders. She was carefully made up, and I scarcely flattered myself that this could be for my benefit alone. I was right. Before I had been there five minutes she had callers: an official of the Company concerned with traveling arrangements, then a subconductor; and lastly Herbert Witherspoon, the Landgraf of last night's performance, who in passing her door had decided, after the informal fashion of opera singers on tour, to drop in for a chat. Thrilled as I was to meet another singer, succulent as were the morsels of musical gossip they tossed back and forth, there seemed to be nothing edible in sight and I was hungry. We never did have any breakfast. On Mr. Witherspoon's departing heels came a masseuse, and I was banished.

"Come back after lunch, child, and we will go for a drive. Then tonight we can hear one act of *Aida* if you like. Witherspoon says that he has a box."

I almost burst into tears. "Oh, Madame, I'm afraid that I can't. My grandfather is waiting for me now. Our train leaves at one o'clock!"

She stared at me thoughtfully for a moment; then seemed to find a sudden and characteristic solution to the problem. "How much are you paying for your room, kid?" she asked.

I did not know, which seemed to amaze her. However, she

snatched the telephone from its hook and called the desk downstairs.

"Please do not cancel the room of Miss Mary Watkins." She managed to stumble a little over this so-funny name, and crinkled her eyes at me. "She is staying on—but put it on my bill now, if you please."

This quite swept me off my feet of course, but as she did not mention Grandfather I gathered with delight that his further presence here was unnecessary. As soon as my legs were again capable of supporting me I went to find him and impart the news. I felt a trifle anxious over this new development, but I was none the less determined. I found the good man patiently reading his morning paper in a sunny corner of the lobby. Having supposed me to be still sleeping, he had breakfasted well without me and was calm and cheerful. Not for long, however. At my news he visibly winced, for in all his long and useful life he had never been faced with a decision quite like this one.

But he doted much on me, the only child of his favorite son. He liked to watch my face light up as it did now, when he took a long breath and finally said: "Very well, my pet. I can't say I go gladly, but I will go. After all, if your parents object, they have only to take the evening train and fetch you back!"

That is exactly what happened.

Upon returning from *Aida*, I found a message under my door saying that my parents had arrived and we would take the first train home in the morning.

I was certain that when I confessed this humiliating denouement to Madame she would be both angry and affronted; but on the contrary, she was quite favorably impressed. Throughout the length of her own unconventional life she always maintained an enormous respect for the conventions in others. Now this, apparently, was the way she thought proper parents should behave. "After all," she said to me in tones of pity for persons so unenlightened, "they know nothing about Olive Fremstad!"

On this occasion, however, they were not to meet.

I went home docilely enough, for I had had my day of glory.

I had shopped grandly with a celebrity who was stared at and required to autograph a hundred cards and books along the route of our excursion. I had dined in the glare of publicity—although made to eat more than I wanted—and had afterwards sat, blissfully torpid, in the seats of the mighty through two acts of *Aïda* while Madame held court and never once forgot to introduce me as “My little friend, Miss . . . Ha ha! . . . *Watkins!*” But the climax of the whole adventure had come when I was watching Madame dress for dinner and the maid, Teresa, had just been sent below for her own meal.

Suddenly Madame Fremstad turned from the mirror and faced me. She gazed at me solemnly for a moment, and then, without warning, delivered herself of a fantastic suggestion—that I stay on and finish the tour with her as far as Denver. Then realizing, perhaps because of my staring eyes and open mouth, that this sudden whim—for whim it must be, what else?—might involve a little too much scrambling for everyone, she revised the plan and quite seriously invited me to meet her in New York in May and sail with her to Europe for the summer. Dazzled and incredulous, I nevertheless accepted on the spot.

It was this heady secret upon which I brooded all during the dusty journey home. Amazed and flattered, I was nevertheless a little uneasy. My native Yankee caution was struggling somewhere underneath the excitement. What if Teresa should really be leaving, as I fancied I had heard her mutter once or twice? What if it was merely the useful possibilities inherent in my youth, health, and enthusiasm which attracted Madame rather than any real personal liking? I had already seen enough of Olive Fremstad to realize that her Nordic forebears had contributed a certain amount of shrewdness to her character.

My parents were quick to pounce upon this very argument when I finally screwed up my courage to tell them all.

“But she must like me just a little, too, otherwise she would not want me around!” I pleaded and was astonished to behold my mother promptly burst into tears. It dimly occurred to me then that she too must “like me a little” and that she had not

been seeing much of me lately. I refused, however, to be affected by such weakness and grew increasingly adamant in my determination; offering all the old arguments worn so threadbare by the young of each succeeding generation: "lead my own life"—"learn by experience"—"freedom to be myself"—and so on, throughout the tedious formula.

Father was the one to introduce a thought which, oddly enough, had not occurred to me until then. "Madame Fremstad is married, I believe. So what about her husband?"

I actually did not know. There had certainly been no evidence of masculine occupation either at the Ansonia or the Windsor. My father, faithful to the Church, frowned darkly on divorce, so I bade that suspicion perish unuttered. Instead I substituted a convenient bit of fiction. "He may be meeting us on the Continent. I imagine that he is already over there on business."

"Oh," said Father, somewhat mollified, "but what business? And what is his name?"

Desperation pricked my memory sharply. A tidbit I had read in some gossip column during the winter popped up just in time. "Why, he is a Mr. Edson Sutphen and he owns all the gold mines in Tierra del Fuego!"

This was true as far as it went. The files of all the newspapers in the country for 1906 bear the story of Olive Fremstad's sudden and romantic marriage in Salt Lake City, while the opera company was making that famous transcontinental tour which ended so dramatically with the San Francisco earthquake. She must have been very circumspect about the affair, for the announcement stunned all her friends and colleagues as well as the public. For years interviews with her had quoted her eloquently upon a favorite theme: Marriage is not for serious artists! When she went right on preaching celibacy even after her own personal lapse, she was often twitted on the inconsistency. Once she parried the protest, "But Madame Fremstad, you yourself are married!" with the startling declaration, "Oh, with me it is only a side show!"

How Mr. Sutphen liked that was not disclosed. I never knew him personally; he had faded from the picture before I entered, and the divorce was made absolute during our sojourn in Europe that first summer. But I often felt as if I had known him, for I inherited many of his responsibilities. Judging from the account books, files, clippings, and other records so carefully kept in his neat, meticulous hand; the splendid jewels and furs which all dated from his régime and to which Madame never thereafter added much of value; the sort of ménage they had together or which she enjoyed while he was around; the various glimpses one gets of him as he darts in and out of newspaper stories during the six years their marriage lasted—he does not seem to have been exactly a side-show type.

He was of Dutch extraction and a graduate of West Point, but not a military man. He was tall, handsome, immaculate. Madame said that he was a "fortune hunter"; and he must have found several for he supplied her with lavish material tokens of his success. As for the gold mines—there was a great splash in the papers when, on the occasion of their second wedding anniversary, he tossed deeds to the lot of them in her lap wrapped up in a \$150,000 life insurance policy. To the day of her death, one of Madame Fremstad's favorite trinkets was a long "belt watch chain," its links divided by dozens of tiny nuggets from the Sutphen mines. A larger nugget, fastened on as a charm, was roughly heart-shaped and set with an amethyst framed in diamonds.

Incidentally, amethysts were Fremstad's favorite stones and she had many of them. One day during my first season with her she returned excitedly from a consultation with one of those pseudo-fortunetellers she could never keep away from for long. This one was Mrs. Asa Neppa Neith Cochrane, who would probably have resented the category in which I have placed her, for she took her "science" very seriously. So did hundreds of women of her day, who flocked in droves to find out what colors they should or should not wear; what names to call their children, their houses, and even themselves; what

numbers and dates would have the most benign influence on their lives. It seemed that Mrs. Cochrane denounced purple as a color unfavorable to the Fremstad career. This explained everything so clearly! There had been colds that winter and canceled performances, with various other misfortunes solely due, it seemed, to the fact that the singer had bought in Paris that fall a violet-colored suit to match her jewels!

After lunch that day Madame went to the wall safe, drew out all her jewels and segregated the amethysts. Then she whistled for me (she never raised her voice) and dumped the collection into my hands. "There, Tinka, these are yours now!"

I was naturally overcome, but I was a little used by that time to her caprices and I demanded an explanation of such sudden generosity.

"They are unlucky for me. You can have Betty make over for you the purple suit too, if you like."

That evening I went down to see my mother (the family had recently moved to New York, largely on my account, I suspect) and showed her my loot. She told me that the amethysts were highly inappropriate for me, and that I must give them back at once. I looked longingly at a certain cabochon bracelet, but I knew that her advice was probably sound. I took the jewels home and hid them under my mattress. Next morning I would make my sacrifice, no matter what crisis it might precipitate.

I need not have worried, for the matter was literally taken out of my hands. After breakfast I was told that before going out Madame wished to see me. To my surprise she stood there arrayed not only in the condemned purple suit, but in a new hat with a violet plume.

"Tinka," she said, "where did you put all my amethysts? I hope you haven't lost them!"

"Your amethysts?" I answered, trying not to smile, "I was under the distinct impression you gave them all to me!"

"Now that is *really absurd*, Tinka!" she replied. "You don't suppose I would be such a fool as that, do you?"

I handed her the package in reproachful silence. She extracted the cabochon bracelet, clasped it over her long kid glove, and carefully put the rest away.

"What a greedy child you are, Tinka," she said amiably. "But you will learn. Now meet me at the theater at noon. I'll send the car back for you."

That bracelet, with her other jewels, was put up for auction after her death many years later. I should like to have bought it, but it went to some stranger for a goodly sum.

But to return to April of that year, and the Vermont rectory. To everyone's surprise, a letter from Madame Fremstad presently arrived. I think that, of all the many strange things that happened during the entire time I knew the singer, this was the most extraordinary; for it seems so out of character. She wrote that she had been thinking much about me and what it must mean to my father and mother to allow me to leave home. She supposed furthermore, that they would naturally wish to know the sort of woman I was to be with. Then, just as if she were a housemaid offering a "character," she suggested that if Father felt the least uneasy, he should write and ask Miss May Callender, or her friend Miss De Forest, all about her. There was no hint in this of the fine arrogance with which she often flung the name *Fremstad!* in the teeth of some poor wretch who failed to recognize her: she wrote with a simplicity and lack of self-importance which were completely disarming.

"Hmm!" said Father. "Who are these ladies?"

Now everyone who was anybody at all in that day knew of Miss Callender. Even I, during my student weeks in New York, had heard of her. Her unique and charming apartment in the old Tiffany house on Madison Avenue was a mecca for everyone distinguished in the social and artistic worlds. She and Miss De Forest conducted a real *salon*; and of all the artists, big and little, who frequented it, the most welcome were the musicians and singers. Whatever there was to know about Olive

Fremstad would be known there. I explained this briefly to Father, adding, in panic, "But you're certainly not going to write them, are you?"

"I certainly am!" said Father, and he did.

Miss Callender's endorsement arrived almost by return mail. I remember she said something like this: "If I had a young daughter and Olive Fremstad invited her to go abroad, I should consider it the most wonderful thing that could happen to her; a good fortune impossible to overestimate."

"All right," said my father at last—and I knew by his stiff lips and white face that the decision was hard—"I suppose that you may go!"

It was not quite so simple as that! Madame Fremstad changed her mind twice before things were settled. One day a devastating telegram from her announced that she was taking an invalid sister with her instead of me. So I plunged into hopeless dejection for twenty-four hours until suddenly another telegram arrived saying the new plan had been abandoned and I must join her next week in New York as arranged. She added, in a postscript: "Great success everywhere."

I began to dance and sing, but my father brooded darkly. "Dear me!" He shuddered. "If she is like that, how can we trust her? She might decide suddenly to drop the child off in the middle of the ocean!"

But my mother was more optimistic. She was selflessly on my side, for she knew well what it was like to be bored in a little town. She ordered down two small trunks from the attic and began to plan what clothes I was to take.

## *Chapter 4*

WE SAILED on the 4th of May, and then the real excitement began—at least I expected it to. Actually, after the first thrills,



the surprise in store for me was the lack of excitement. We had, of course, a superb cabin. A guarantee of this was written into the Fremstad contract with the Metropolitan, and so too, I discovered, was the passage back and forth to Europe annually, not only for herself, but for a maid and a companion as well. I presumably came under the latter heading, for I shared her suite and had not yet become a buffer. It tickled my fancy mightily to think that I was traveling to Europe at the expense of the Metropolitan Opera Company.

We had the best of everything the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* (now at the bottom of the sea) could offer. My family, which very naturally came to see me off, together with a batch of curious fellow students from the League, were all very much impressed by the luxury in which I was to travel. Madame Fremstad was nice to them in a detached sort of way. She was very conscious of herself at the moment, as a celebrity in the public eye, and in high spirits, posed for pictures and rallied a group of reporters, all the while keeping a weather eye out for what was happening to Madame Lillian Nordica, also sailing and also being interviewed.

When it came time for farewells, Father and Mother sought a word with her. It was plain to see that their parental hearts were swelling with emotion and anxiety. I found it easier not to look at them and I hoped they understood. I think the singer, always susceptible to authority and uniforms of any kind, was a little disturbed by Father's clerical garb and his collar which buttoned in the back. However, she had her own ideas of how clergymen ought to behave, and I am afraid he disappointed her.

"Take care of my little girl," he said to her, his eyes moist. But she was having none of that sort of thing just then.

"On the contrary, she is here to take care of me," she told him firmly.

He then asked (with justifiable interest, it seemed to me) where we were going.

"I haven't the slightest idea!" Madame said airily. I could

see Father tensing for an appropriate *riposte*. Cleric or not, he always had small patience with flippancy. But a pleading look from me and a touch on his arm from Mother, who understood that now of all times was not the moment to make trouble, gave him pause. Madame was obviously on edge and perfectly capable of kissing me good-by then and there, and sending us all home together.

Father gulped and rose superbly above the whole thing. The gong was sounding, and the "All ashore that's going . . ." The German band on the forward deck was playing the waltz from *Die Meistersinger*, and the crowds began milling toward the gangplank. Father shook Madame Fremstad's hand.

"Don't you worry," he said, neatly turning the tables, "Mary will keep us posted—and have a good restful summer wherever you are!" I was proud of him. I embraced them both fondly and walked with them to the gate, where I watched them step down and out of my life, never to enter it again for many years except as shadowy figures in the background of events.

I returned to Madame Fremstad's side and was amazed to find her bidding good-by to Teresa. I had ceased to worry about the maid's leaving; I had seen her unpacking in the cabin and had felt much comfort at the sight, for, not counting my own modest effects, we had with us twenty-two trunks and fourteen pieces of hand luggage.

"Good-by, Fräulein," the maid whispered, with what sounded suspiciously like a note of gaiety in her usually drab utterance. "Here are the keys and Madame's jewel case. The throat spray is in the brown medicine bag, four of the trunks are in the corridor, the steward has taken most of the flowers to put on ice." She scurried off, looking happy and even a little pretty.

Clutching the jewel case, I followed Madame. I should have liked to wave to my parents and watch the shores of the harbor recede. But sailing was no treat to an opera singer; it was all in a day's work. She took my arm. "Come on, Tinka, let's go and get settled before that horrible motion begins."

Teresa had left everything in order, so our settling really con-

sisted of reading cards and opening bon-voyage packages. I think Madame was a little disgruntled to find that some of the latter were for me. For a fleeting moment I had the impression that she considered tossing them with me out into the corridor. But most of them contained food, and she, contrary to her protestations, loved to eat. She fell upon a red tin box of Dean's cakes, and grumbling about their richness, sampled several. She pounced next on a green satin air-pillow that someone had sent to me.

"Marvelous," she cried, "exactly what I need!"

Presently I asked her what she thought of my parents and she frowned and pursed her lips. "Your mother's corset is too tight," she said. "As for your father, he is a *fine* minister of the Gospel!"

I could tell this was not meant for a compliment. "How do you mean?" I asked fearfully, torn between tribal loyalty and a desire not to annoy.

"Only this, Tinka; when he shook my hand, what did he say? He said 'Have a good time!' I assure you I was very disillusioned."

"But," I inquired with growing curiosity, "what should he have said?"

"Ah, Tinka, he is supposed to be a saintly man—near the altar. He should have held my two hands and looked deep into my eyes and said, 'My child, seek ye first the kingdom of God!' That was what I needed!"

("Bosh!" chuckled Father irreverently when this was repeated to him some months later.)

We had a copious lunch at a preferred table for two, which had been engaged for us by request. That Nordica was at the Captain's table Fremstad noted without concern for, she explained, she herself had refused that honor. She rarely came to the dining room except on the first and final days of a voyage. "I am the woman that nobody knows!" she reminded me.

In the afternoon our deck chairs were located and disapproved. Finally some other travelers, innocent of any conniv-

ance, were informed by a red-faced steward that there had been an error; and they were forthwith ousted from their wind-sheltered corner. They were Germans and when told who had preempted their places, counted themselves honored and withdrew with much hand-kissing and snapping of heels. Later they were not so pleased to observe that these chairs were occupied during most of the voyage by the singer's little *Backfisch* alone.

The sea was roughening somewhat when Madame decided that we must take a preprandial stroll in the fresh air. Presently she was halted in the Wagnerian stride with which she habitually moved, high seas or not, by a pleasant salutation from a large bundle of mink. There, in an ordinary deck chair without any pretensions to a favored location, sat Madame Lillian Nordica eating her dinner from a tray in her lap. Fremstad immediately seized upon the idea, sat down beside her, and calling to the steward, ordered similar dinners for herself and me.

Her manner toward Nordica interested me. They had sung together several times in various opera houses here and abroad, but Nordica had already left the Metropolitan. I had never heard her, of course, but I was deeply impressed by her fame and had to pinch myself to realize that I was actually having dinner beside her. Oddly enough, Fremstad's approach to her was not unlike my own, full of deference, wonder, and delight. She listened to her as to an oracle and, it seemed to me, made herself appear very young and inexperienced, a mere beginner sitting at the feet of a veteran! Whether this was professional cunning or, for the moment, sincere feeling I was not able to guess. At any rate the effect was good.

Fremstad had recently confided to me that she herself was thirty-nine years old, adding that although this was not strictly true, it was better for me not to know exactly. She was right. How old is she? was always the first question asked me by everyone. I never learned the truth until her last illness. She seemed and looked very youthful and vigorous, if not precisely girlish at that time, but to me Madame Nordica appeared to be quite

an old lady, partaking somewhat of the quality of my grandmother and her friends. Perhaps this effect was due to the old-fashioned hair arrangement, the erect posture, the elegance. She was still beautiful but her face had begun to crumple, her movements were twittery, and her voice seemed high and shallow in comparison to Fremstad's deep-throated speech.

Singers' speaking voices always surprised me. The men usually sounded hoarse or gruff, or if tenors, effeminate; while very few of the women had any trace of the magic in their tones which their singing voices might lead one to expect. Nordica's voice was on the birdlike side, as was the bright, pretty way she cocked her head.

She told us that she was on her way to sing Isolde in Berlin and I looked at her with awe and amazement; here, in her bosomy fur coat and her turban of violet-petals, picking daintily at an ice, was an aging dowager whom no earthly alchemy could, I believed, ever transform into the passionate Irish princess of Wagner's love poem. But later we read in the *Paris Herald* of her great success.

After our *al fresco* meal I paced the deck with both divas for a short constitutional. I remember that I was between them and that each clutched one of my arms, and as they talked, they often stopped and leaned across me as if I were not really there at all. It was certainly fantastic enough that I should be; but as neither of these famous ladies was very sylphlike, I knew it for a fact with every roll of the ship.

It was in her character of kindly dowager rather than operatic tragedienne that Madame Nordica brightened the rest of the voyage for us. Fremstad came down with a cold and this, combined with a bit of weather, kept her grumbling and depressed in her cabin. She sat there day after day in the dim light, the gypsy scarf on her head, dressed in a strange woolen garment which had once served her for Ortrud. I read aloud to her, endless detective stories which she seemed to enjoy but made not the slightest effort to follow, preferring to give most of her attention to correcting my diction.

Fremstad's own command of the English language was very odd. She spoke fluently, with only the faintest trace of accent, and loved to express herself colloquially—a stunt in which she had enormous success with the more frivolous representatives of the press. But her vocabulary was actually quite limited; she often misused words and misunderstood others, sometimes with puzzling results. Much of her so-called slang was obsolete, dating back to her Midwestern girlhood; but she fancied it highly. For instance a favorite phrase of hers, usually applied in irritation at an unresponsive audience was: "Sitting out there just like a row of stoking bottles!" This mystified me and I asked her what "stoking bottles" were.

"Well," she said, "you certainly ought to know; it is American slang!" But I never found out.

At that particular time she was most at home in German, and I soon became used to sentences beginning in that language, switching in the middle to English and possibly ending in Italian or French. Those languages into which she rarely lapsed, except with members of her family or old friends in Minnesota, were her twin mother-tongues of Swedish and Norwegian. Not that she was ashamed of them; she was, on the contrary, enormously proud of her Viking heritage. It was simply because they played small part, if any, in the operatic career which then absorbed her. The one exception to this is to be found in the marginal notations on her scores. Dramatic directions are written chiefly in German or English, but her private reminders to herself of how to breathe, phrase, or attack a difficult note, are all in Scandinavian—"So none of you busybodies can read them!" she would explain.

Into the gloomy atmosphere of the cabin Madame Nordica penetrated daily like a ray of sunshine, announcing her arrival with a flutelike trill outside the door. She brought her stricken colleague each time a different "pretty," as she expressed it, to look at. One day it was a new *chapeau* which she claimed to have made herself; on another occasion perhaps an orchid or a

perfect bunch of hothouse grapes. But on the last day—most sensational of all—she brought her famous emeralds. I still gasp with the remembrance of their beauty after all these years. Festooned on beds of ivory velvet in their morocco cases, they seemed like great drops of sunlit ocean caught there in a blaze of diamond spray. She let us both try them on and Madame Fremstad laughed so hard at the effect of those magnificent ear-drops dangling beside my big black hair-bow, that I think the spasm cured her. She got up for dinner that night for the first time and appeared in a fine display of her own jewels, fetched by me in hot haste from the purser's safe.

We owed something else to Madame Nordica who, tragically enough, we never saw again after that voyage.\* She warned Fremstad concerning the effects of chill, damp Vienna on a cough such as hers, and recommended a period of convalescence in Italy; specifically the Hotel Villa d'Este at Cernobbio on the Lake of Como. To my delight we took her advice. We spent the first night ashore at a hotel in Cherbourg, and next day passed as casually through Paris as if it were Brooklyn or Jersey City.

It had rained on the Lake of Como for three weeks and would, so our hack-driver grimly informed us, probably continue to do so for three more. The flowery land of my dreams was waterlogged and so was the Villa d'Este, down whose magnificent frescoed walls ran rivulets of moisture to join the humid drops collecting on the handsome tessellated floors. As for the lake and hills, both were hidden as if by a steam curtain straight out of the Metropolitan Opera House. But I had no regrets, for a decision was now made to move on to Florence where, it was said, the sun could be relied upon. One horrible day and evening were spent sorting and repacking the twenty-two trunks

\* Lillian Nordica was on a world tour when in December, 1913, her ship, the *Tasman*, ran aground off the coast of Malaya. As a result of this experience the singer had a nervous seizure which developed into pneumonia and she was eventually removed to a hospital in Batavia, Java. After several relapses she died there in May, 1914.

and reducing to a mere eight the number which were to continue the journey with us. Even so, we were left with a formidable bit of luggage.

Trunks were trunks in those days; some as tall as a man and reinforced with metal, leather, and slats of polished wood. I had been curious to know what could possibly fill twenty-two of them and I now found out. One was devoted to shoes alone, another to hats; four contained operatic costumes and wigs to be remade in Paris; five others held every concert gown or *grande toilette* Madame had ever owned, all similarly destined. Another, lined with cedar, was for furs. There was a trunk for the sea voyage only; and a trunk for her music, letters, and account books. And then there was the "homelike trunk," the most interesting of all and the first to be opened wherever we went. In it was the Carmen shawl, the picture of the Sad Shepherd, the leopard skin from the dressing room, a small bronze Winged Victory, and another bronze figure called "Musica" (a strangely repulsive fat boy with a lute, to which the singer was devotedly attached), several sofa pillows, and a number of covers and runners, some in brocade, others in bright peasant linens. A vase, a bonbon dish and a framed photograph of Lilli Lehmann completed this outfit which had to be spread cozily around us whenever we stopped in one place for longer than a day or so.

"My name means *strange city*!" sighed Olive Fremstad. "And well it may! So I have to make a home where I can."

The remaining seven trunks were assigned to necessities, so considered. Underwear graded for every conceivable variation in occasion or weather; dresses, suits, and coats equally graded; blankets, sheets, pillow cases, hot-pads, thermos bottles, kettles and other utensils; even a few plates, knives and forks and a cookbook; as well as countless umbrellas, parasols and walking sticks. Two of the largest trunks proved to be entirely empty, brought along for the sole purpose of accommodating additional possessions to be acquired during the trip. These last were among the fourteen sent back to Paris, with which, of course, went both of mine. My essentials were somehow squeezed into



the copious hand luggage, and the following morning, my brain reeling with lists, we departed for Florence where we stayed for two heavenly weeks full of hot sun and golden mist.

The view from our pension terrace on the slope of San Domenico charmed the eye: it included flat red roofs, gray olive groves punctuated with the black of cypresses; and far below, as on a colossal cyclorama, floated the dreamy city of the Duomo, Giotto's belfry, the towers of the Bargello and the Palazzo Vecchio. Our pension was an ancient ducal villa, its faded magnificence set in balustraded gardens full of mimosa, jasmine, and orange and lemon trees embellished with nightingales. It was warm and utterly still by day, and the nights in our vaulted suite, with its own wide loggia, were cool and fresh and fragrant. All this, in addition to the excellent table and the soft-footed service, seemed to supply everything that a tired prima donna might require.

I, however, grew a little restive, as the sunny, empty days filed by, marked only by the dull occupations of mending, reading and eating. I began to chafe at the thought of Florence there at my feet, unvisited, and feared that the pictures on the cards which I mailed home in such profusion were all that I would see. One morning I suggested to Madame, who was safely established in a deck chair under an aloe with her wordbook of *Armide*, that I go down and view the sights on my own.

She cried out in horror. What, a young girl alone on the streets of an Italian city! I must be quite mad! Should she permit any such indiscretion, my parents would indeed have cause for alarm. However, the following morning she engaged a guide and rushed breathlessly with me through every steaming picture gallery in town. Here I was initiated into her real interest in art, and learned to see the great paintings in terms of a pose, a cloak, a crown, or even a sandal, which could be sketched in a notebook against some future need in one of her roles. We paused briefly for an ice at Doney's in the Via Tuornaboni, where she was recognized by a tableful of Americans and came away fatigued but in high good humor.

The next day was Sunday and the cacophony of bells woke us early. At breakfast Madame Fremstad recalled having read on a poster in the square that Strauss's *Salome*, in which she herself had sung the American premiere five years earlier, was to be given that night at the opera with Gemma Bellincioni in the title role. She now decided that at all costs we must attend. One of the costs was a conspicuous unbending on her part toward a solo flight by me into the wicked town. I think she felt that she had made her gesture and done her good deed and could now relax. At any rate she said, "Tinka, I have ordered a *carrozza* for you. Go down and get us seats for tonight!"

I was panic-stricken. I was not yet sufficiently divorced from the Vermont rectory to contemplate without a lively sense of guilt, attending any theater on a Sunday, particularly to see such a questionable work as *Salome* was reputed to be. Besides, how could I ever buy tickets without knowing Italian? I offered this excuse almost tearfully.

"Rubbish!" said Madame, refusing even to write down the necessary words for me. "Go ahead and struggle. What you learn this way you will never forget!"

It might have been a motto for life with which she was equipping me, and I have learned to appreciate it long since, if not just then. But I did get the errand done and with Olive Fremstad's indirect and unconscious assistance after all. I put two fingers through the grill of the box office and said "*Salome!*" Then summoning to my mind the familiar scene in *Tosca* where the beleaguered heroine asks Scarpia the cost of what she has been bargaining for, I leaned toward the clerk and quoted dramatically: "*Quanto? Il prezzo!*"

The clerk accepted these histrionics without visible astonishment, and gave me back the correct change, I trust, from my 500-lire note.

So we went to the opera and I was much diverted. I thought the story revolting but it was so badly staged it didn't matter. The music stunned me completely, although I couldn't agree with Fremstad's famous *pronunciamento* that "it made Wagner

sound like Mozart." Poor Signora Bellincioni appeared to me to be at least one hundred years old and practically doddering, but the younger Salome sat there in wrapt attention and insisted that as the woman had once been a very great artist she must be respected. It was during this performance, too, that I received the first of the bruises which were always to be my lot when I went to the theater with Madame, who constantly prodded me with her elbow whenever anything struck her as noteworthy.

"Can you picture *me*, Tinka?" she whispered, smiling with some inner satisfaction as Bellincioni teetered cautiously on the rim of the cistern. "I was not nearly so ladylike, I assure you!"

Many years later, when Olive Fremstad was a very old woman, ill and alone in a nursing home, I sat with her beside the radio listening to a broadcast of *Salome* from the Metropolitan, with Ljuba Welitsch, the newest sensation in the role. Suddenly, in the midst of the noisiest climax, the aged prima donna reached out her crippled hand and switched off the whole thing.

"My God, Tinka!" she exclaimed, regarding me with deep dismay, "for that I once shed my heart's blood!"

We went behind the scenes of course, that night in Florence, but for some reason I was not taken into the dressing room. Left to wander aimlessly about while waiting, I came suddenly upon the head of John the Baptist lying there neglected for the moment on its silver charger. I recoiled as if it were Medusa and her snakes. It was life-size and full of grisly Italian realism and I could think of nothing but a Sunday joint on its platter of gravy. I was white around the gills when Madame Fremstad rejoined me and she laughed heartily. On the way home she told me about her own troubles with the head in New York.

"I had to have great courage," she said, "for it looked exactly like my father!"

She also explained why she always used to stagger a little when she lifted the dish from the black arm of the executioner.

"A human head is very heavy. While I was rehearsing I wondered about this, so I went down to the morgue and found out."

Her Salome had shocked the sensibilities of the matrons and virgins of the Metropolitan Parterre in 1906 and after the dress rehearsal and one public performance it was banned. Two decades later, with less realistic and infinitely less gifted singers, the opera became a favorite for society-patronized benefits!

## *Chapter 5*

BY THIS TIME June was just around the corner and commitments in Austria loomed close at hand. To my delight, the route to Vienna led through Venice and almost before I knew it we were ensconced at the Grand Hotel, with a balcony over the Canal. The magic of the city soon laid hold on Olive Fremstad, and in spite of the heat, she decided to linger on a bit, in order that I might sketch a few Titian hairdos in the galleries for her while she ordered at the glass factories long chains of specially blown "antique" beads for Isolde. I was always amused by the way she bought presents and gewgaws for her various roles, as if they were a family of beloved daughters back home in New York, who ought to have souvenirs of her travels. Beads for Isolde, a bonnet for Tosca, a new girdle for Fricka, and a beautiful flowing wig for Brünnhilde II (the younger Brünnhilde could use her old one!). Kundry was to receive this year not only a brand-new crown, but four Gothic rings chained to a heavy gold bracelet—a sort of barbaric jeweled harness for the hand, which could, on occasion, be loaned to Isolde.

On our second day the diva decided to take a sea bath at the Lido and show me, as a great privilege, where she had "once been so happy!" Having thus piqued my curiosity, she confided no details; but when she pronounced the name of that fabled strand, her brows arched high and the look came into her eyes which had so often enslaved her audiences—an intense blue

gaze mysteriously lighted from within—I suspected youthful romance.

Anyone who knows the Lido today would not have recognized it then. Cabaña life was in its infancy, only one large hotel had risen beside the beach itself, and the tree-lined streets were sprinkled with pretty villas in gardens, many of them pensions. We went out there for a day and we stayed a week. A launch had taken us over and we promptly rented a cabaña and bathing costumes. The cabaña was one of a sparse, single line and, although it is hard to imagine this now, had some privacy. It was scarcely luxurious—four walls of bamboo or matting, a slatted floor, and a little sheltered porch with two canvas chairs. Although I resented the spectacle of Isolde in a hired Italian bathing suit, I had, nevertheless, to admire her aquatic prowess. She was as much at home in the water as she later proved to be on ice skates, both talents a direct heritage from her childhood beside the Norwegian fjords.

Peasant women with flat baskets of fruit on their heads stopped beside our porch and from them we bought our lunch. There were few people on the beach, but toward evening, when we were getting ready for a last dip before returning to Venice, a strange couple wandered our way across the sand. The woman was tall, rather coarse of feature, with conspicuous front teeth much too far apart, but her bearing had a certain distinction and one knew her at once to be a personage. The man was rotund and shorter than she, with a fleshy, tired face, a beard, and not much hair. He might have sat for a bust of Socrates, especially as he was attired in a strange Attic garment of linen and embroidered bands, which left one shoulder bare but flapped about his ankles. The woman wore a similar costume, half Mother Hubbard, half toga, of brown and blue.

Fremstad sprang up with a burst of delighted German. The strangers' greetings were equally effusive. Eventually I was remembered and introduced to *Frau Hofkammersängerin* Anna Bahr-Mildenburg, famous as the creator of Clytemnestra in

Strauss's *Elektra*, and still a leading soprano of the Royal Viennese Opera. The rotund Socrates was her husband, the playwright Hermann Bahr, who at that time enjoyed a reputation comparable to Molnar's a decade later. (His play, *The Concert*, starring Leo Dietrichstein, was currently a smash hit in New York.)

These celebrities were extremely cordial in every way, but as I then understood very little German, I missed much of what was being said. The gist of their excited argument appeared to be that Fremstad should certainly remain for a time in the hot, healing sunshine, washing away her season's weariness in the green waters of the Adriatic.

Once again the impact of suddenly altered plans! To this, however, I was rapidly becoming inured. We returned to Venice and spent a restless night packing and repacking until a dozen valises were made to hold what we needed. Checking the remaining tower of luggage with the hotel porter, we sailed back across the lagoon in the early morning light, secured the cabaña for a week, and took rooms in a luxurious garden pension recommended by the Bahrs, although they themselves were living more thriftily elsewhere. They did, however, lend us two of their togas for the length of our stay. As I was about half Frau Mildenburg's size, I flopped about gracelessly in folds of material caught up with safety pins. The Bahrs adhered to some sort of health cult, of which these costumes were the uniform, and Fremstad, always susceptible to this sort of thing, joined up enthusiastically for herself and me. I still have the little notebook in which *die* Mildenburg wrote for us, in a script at least half an inch high, the addresses of health restaurants in Vienna, shops for health foods, and even one for health corsets. In view of these persuasions, I was much impressed, dining with them that first evening on the terrace of the Lido's best hotel, by the gargantuan repast they consumed, eating their way without hesitation straight through a long and rich table d'hôte.

They not only dined us, they also took us to hear a surprisingly lively and competent performance of *The Barber of*

*Seville*. Our *loge* in the charming little Lido theater was oddly located, right on the stage, and when the curtain fell, we found ourselves on the wrong side of it, among the artists. This entertained me vastly, for everyone came over to do obeisance to the great ones who had condescended to witness the very humble efforts of the local company. They did not seem humble to me but full of engaging *brío* and zest. Fremstad made a note of the baritone's name and promised to get him an audition at the Metropolitan and on a subsequent evening he came to see her at the pension, but he strutted and bellowed too much, and he had not washed enough. When he left, she tossed the paper with his name on it into the wastebasket and forgot the whole incident.

After several days of this carefree existence, we noted one afternoon that the Bahr-Mildenburg cabaña appeared deserted. That evening we found a note at the pension advising us to leave as promptly and inconspicuously as possible. Cholera had broken out in Venice, and it was rumored that the city was to be quarantined at midnight.

What a scurrying this news produced! Olive Fremstad was always magnificent in a crisis, if rarely calm. She reacted to this emergency very much as she might have to a suddenly announced *Götterdämmerung* which granted her no time for rehearsal or make-up. In white-hot tension we packed, paid bills, wrote off the cabaña, booked a gondola to Venice. Another hour or two of strained and not very convincing play-acting followed at the Grand Hotel. No one must suspect that we were in a panic or had any intention of moving elsewhere than back to the Lido; a deception which owed its success entirely to numerous fifty-lire notes pressed into willing palms. Three gondolas for the trunks, one for ourselves—I remember the stately procession through the malodorous back canals, where tiny green crabs, like bloated spiders, enmeshed themselves along the escarpments left bare by the receding tide. The beautiful, fabulous city had suddenly become hideous!

On the train that night Madame Fremstad lowered a window

to air the hot, crowded carriage. Snow peaks leaned across the horizon in the moonlight and she lifted a Brünnhilde face and cried, "There, Tinka, look up there! That is what we think of when we sing the great roles!"

Throughout my life, whenever I have seen high mountains, these words have echoed romantically in my memory; but that night I was dog-tired, and in spite of the excitement and the heat, I went promptly to sleep, my perspiring face against the contested green satin air-pillow, which proved to be far from color-fast. The next morning, in the grimy half-light of a railway carriage dawn, my cheeks were the shade of an unripe peach, and everyone was sure I had cholera. The carriage emptied precipitately and Madame and I rode in comfortable isolation for the rest of the journey. I was not permitted to wash until just before our arrival.



Vienna was heaven. The old Kaiser was still alive and his imperial touch animated the life of the city. The aristocracy still dashed through the streets in open carriages with galloping horses and outriders, and the few who possessed motorcars had their coats of arms emblazoned on them, with coronets or crowns, as the case might be, hanging where license plates are now attached. The air was full of music: the carriages had buglers; the royal automobile horns played snatches from Brahms or Wagner; even the postman had a horn (a curly one with yellow tassels), and a special boy in a top hat to blow it for him. On all important corners were cafés where the orchestras played day and night; in the side streets were beer gardens gay with the sound of accordion and fiddle, of yodeling and rhythmic clapping. In every park and public garden from twilight on, orchestras or bands played waltzes or selections from the classics; and at least two opera houses and a dozen theaters were functioning full blast.

The streets were peopled, it seemed to me, by the choruses and ballets of a hundred operettas. There were yokels from the



provinces in every variety of folk costume; there were soldiers and officers with spiked mustaches and long sideburns, strutting and swaggering along the Ring in their skin-tight breeches and glazed boots, their elaborately braided jackets with empty sleeves tossed over their shoulders. These gorgeous young males, dazzling though they were, really seemed more like puppets to me than like human beings—especially when, encountering some elegant female dripping with feathers and lace, they clicked their spurred heels and bent with automaton-like precision over a daintily gloved hand, implanting thereon the mechanical facsimile of a kiss. I felt that one really ought to stop and applaud them.

Madame Fremstad was as pleased to exhibit this spectacle to me as if she had personally produced it.

"What did I tell you, Tinka?" she said proudly. She hadn't told me anything, as it happened, so the whole pageant burst upon me without preparation and I walked as in a dream.

For some reason (I suspected the "health" propaganda of the Bahr-Mildenburgs) we did not stop at Fremstad's usual hotel, the fashionable Bristol, but at an odd and anachronistic hostelry down near St. Stephen's Church, called the Matschakerhof. This was unchanged, I should say, since coaching days; it had a paved courtyard and galleries, and large, solemn suites of rooms heavy with marble, red plush, and ormolu, although somewhat deficient in sanitary arrangements. But it was not a bad choice: at the Bristol Olive Fremstad would have been merely one among a score of distinguished visitors; at the Matschakerhof she was *rr*. Servitors bowed and scraped and dashed around in beavies airing the rooms, warming our sheets, thrusting tight pyramids of flowers into ornate vases. We received a special visitation from the chef, and one from the housekeeper, and presently a fine piano with marquetry case and attached bronze candelabra appeared as if by magic in our salon, followed by an obsequious tuner. We had a wonderful lunch at which I encountered for the first time those delicious egg-sized dumplings, or *Knödeln*, which then floated in every

Austrian broth and were largely responsible for the Austrian figure.

This first visit to Vienna lasted only four days, but they were full ones. Fremstad was closeted long with the eminent Professor Roller (he who had designed the Brünnhilde costume which I had so much admired) and I was left to browse in his wonderful circular library which contained a collection of costume plates and art books second to none in Europe. When I saw the informality of the Metropolitan costume department the following winter I could not help marveling that New York ever managed to produce anything right at all. Fremstad always said, however, "The German [or Austrian] designers are marvelous for Gothic costumes, but never, never trust them with anything else!"

We went one evening to hear one of the earliest performances of a new Strauss opera, *Der Rosenkavalier*. It was soon to be done at the Metropolitan and Fremstad wanted to look it over with a view to singing the Octavian. This would indeed have been a superb role for her. It was cast in her best vocal range; and with her fine legs and lean haunches, she would have made a handsome boy. She was well aware of this and told me that she had often sung male parts in Munich and had been much admired in them; that even in *Carmen* she sometimes wore breeches for mountain climbing in Act III.

The new opera was enchanting and beautifully produced. Between acts Madame held court. Kurt Schindler (the young American-Viennese conductor, later of New York's Schola Cantorum) had spotted her at once from his seat nearby and presently everyone who was anybody—Austrian and American alike—had come and paid his respects to the great Fremstad who on this occasion had on all her war paint, sabres and diamonds, and looked exactly what she was, a *prima donna assoluta*.

"What do you think of Octavian for me?" she asked of everyone, suggesting the while, by the merest flick of an eyelash, how much better she would be than Fräulein Gutheil-Schoder, who had created the part and was singing that night. Everyone

agreed that it was the role of roles for her, and for the rest of the evening she devoted herself to a critical analysis involving many fresh bruises for me as she drove each observation home with her elbow in my ribs. But in the end Mr. Gatti-Casazza offered her the part of the Marschallin in the American première. Outraged and disappointed, she promptly turned it down, although eventually she was sorry that she had.

On our remaining Vienna evenings we saw plays of which I found I understood a little, and in the intermissions the scene at the opera was repeated. During the day things went on of which I knew very little, for as I have said, I was not yet the official Fremstad buffer, and being speechless, was incapable of being very useful. I was generally left at the hotel to guard the luggage and get on with the endless mending, but one afternoon I was taken along to have *Jause* (to my ignorant ears, "*Yowsuh*" sounded exciting but this explosive term meant merely afternoon coffee) with a *Gräfin*, an elderly, hook-nosed, black-clad aristocrat who lived in an echoing palace smelling of cabbage and mothballs. There were other guests—officers in braid and astrakhan, ladies in high collars and dust-gathering trains—but no one my age. Watching the hand-kissing and salutes, listening to the soft colloquial chatter, I felt very much out of it all and plumped myself down—inconspicuously, as I thought—in the corner of a Biedermeier sofa. From this I was summarily plucked, almost by the scruff of my neck, by Fremstad's gloved hand.

"Get up, Tinka!" she whispered indignantly, "I'm surprised at you!"

The surprise was mutual, but nothing was explained. I stood stiff and trembling in the background for a while, then settled, with many misgivings, upon a brocaded ottoman. This was apparently correct, for I remained undisturbed and was given hot chocolate and cakes to reward me. When we reached the hotel I ventured to inquire about the sofa episode and also why so many gentlemen indicated their intention of kissing my hand

by murmuring "*Küss d'Hand!*" and never actually did it. Fremstad was horrified.

"Where *have* you been brought up, Tinka!"

The answer was Vermont, of course, which she had probably forgotten, where sofas were free to all and kisses were pecks on the cheek.

"Don't you know," she continued severely, "that no young girl ever presumes to take a sofa seat when there are married women present? As for hand-kissing, that is only for us too, and for the *Hoheiten*."

I had no ambition to become an Austrian aristocrat—and a good thing too, considering what happened to *them*—but on my first visit to Vienna after my marriage no sofa escaped me, and I learned to thrust out the back of my hand with an authority not to be denied.

Our last evening in Vienna was spent quietly, but it was memorable just the same. All was now packed; trunks, hand luggage, bundles of groceries and comestibles stood about the salon. A cook, whose name apparently was "Catty," had been engaged and was established for the night in some cell up under the Matschakerhof eaves. So Madame and I went for a final stroll in the soft summer dusk. Passing a walled garden, she saw white flowers nodding.

"*Ach, der Holunder!*" she cried, drawing a deep breath of fragrance. "It must soon be St. John's Eve!"

I was completely mystified. Reared on the liturgical calendar, I of course knew the Saints' Days. But how did she? I asked. She stopped short and withered me with a look.

"My poor child!" she said, "have you never heard of Hans Sachs?"

I certainly had, I told her, as mystified as ever.

"Then," she said, "it is inexcusable. Why, every man, woman, and child over here thinks of Sachs whenever the elderflower blooms. He has a bush at the corner of his house in *Meistersinger*, Act III! One doesn't forget that sort of thing!"

Later that evening we passed a park with a high iron fence

around it, a crowd within, and a band playing *Lohengrin*. We stopped, listened, and, drawn by the familiar music, decided to enter. But it was the last number and no more admissions were being sold. A braided functionary repulsed our best efforts.

"Poor fellow!" said Fremstad, drawing herself to her most regal height. "You are making a terrible mistake and you will someday regret it. I am the Duchess of Brabant herself and that music was written for me. Let us pass!"

The gatekeeper wavered slightly and looked at her with growing respect. Like all Teutons, he was impressed by any display of arrogance and authority. Then his gaze fell on me and he knew us for impostors.

"*Aber was!*" he growled. "*Verrückte Amerikanerin!*" and slammed his wicket shut, turning an enormous key.

Olive Fremstad frowned and drew in a mighty breath. Ortrud's Curse was sounding beyond the gate. She lifted her enormous voice and sang the phrase with all the opulence and drama she had once given it in the theater.

"Now, he will never know what hit him," she laughed gaily, "and the people in there will think they have had too much beer!"

There was indeed a rising murmur and a sound of chairs being pushed back, although the music did not stop. A fiacre was hovering beside us in the street, its driver watching us with undisguised curiosity. Madame beckoned, we got in, and were driven back to the hotel.

## Chapter 6

OUR NEXT DESTINATION, until now scarcely mentioned by Madame (it could be a matter of no possible concern to me of course!) was Karlstein, a small village near the border of Bo-

hemia in lower Austria. Karlstein was not a resort; Karlstein was noted for nothing, not even the fact, which I only discovered myself quite recently, that in the Dark Ages, its castle had been a country seat of the Carlovingian kings. It had been out of the world, apparently, since the tenth century. Even as late as 1911 no railroad condescended to pass anywhere near it. That Olive Fremstad chose it from among all the possibilities offered on the European continent as a place to spend a summer, was entirely due to Hans Morgenstern, a subconductor and *répétiteur* at the Metropolitan—none other, in fact, than the harried little man I had seen emerging from the elevator at the Hotel Ansonia months before. He had, it seems, been born and raised somewhere thereabouts and liked to pass his vacations with his parents in the old home town. Madame Fremstad was accustomed to working with him, and as it made no great difference to her where, she had agreed to follow him to his native heath.

But even she, a seasoned cosmopolitan and inured to the vicissitudes of travel, had never imagined anything like Karlstein. The trip down, on a *Bummelzug* that stopped at every crossroads, was discouraging to begin with. Smothered in dust and cinders, it took us four hours to go a hundred miles, and I could see the face of Kathi, the cook, growing longer and longer as we puffed past endless wheat fields and uncountable dung heaps. Buzzing black flies poured in through our recklessly opened window, and Madame by this time was wearing an expression which over the years I learned to interpret as "Martyrdom for Art." It was a noble expression, mingling pain and fortitude, and it imposed on all her entourage an obligation to suffer and endure in the same spirit. No sense of humor was permitted to lighten the burden for any of us, a severe strain for me as that particular day developed more and more absurdities.

About noon our *Bummelzug* paused beside an ugly church and a huddle of farmhouses. This was a junction where the rare passenger for Karlstein was supposed to descend and continue to his destination under his own steam. We were relieved

to behold Morgenstern himself on the platform. Our greeting to him was warm, but his to us was detached and vague, and there was about him an elusive aura of distress. We soon learned why.

Morgenstern was in his way quite as temperamental as Madame, but not as practical. By a Herculean effort he had managed to get himself to this place to meet us, but it seems not to have occurred to him that some provision must be made to get the rest of us away from there. There was no vehicle in sight but the single-seated farm cart in which he had driven over from his own village. When he saw Kathi and me and the eight trunks and fourteen pieces of hand luggage, he simply threw his arms in the air and gave up. He sat down on one of the trunks and sulked; tears filled his eyes. Kathi gazed after the receding train and she too began to cry. Fremstad simply paced up and down, up and down, as she always did in the wings when waiting for her entrance cue. Each time she passed the man responsible for all this she seared him with a look and flung sarcastic, bitter "Thank you"s at his drooping head. I was entranced, and I fear that presently I giggled. This distracted her attention and she paused before me.

"Well, Tinka, if it's as funny as all that, why don't you do something?"

She clasped her throat with the singer's time-honored gesture of desperation and her eyebrows shot up quite out of sight. Then she stalked to the edge of the platform and stood staring out over the empty fields as if to seek what solace she could in the golden sea of wheat splashed with its froth of scarlet poppies. I was terribly sorry for her. This was far worse than any tantrum.

I went over to the cowering Morgenstern.

"Look," I said, "can't you see that something has to be done? We are dusty, hungry and tired. Madame has got to get on to Karlstein or she will be ill."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Obviously," he agreed. "But how to go?"

He was infuriating as always. So I approached the farm lad

on the cart, who was smoking a long porcelain pipe and watching the scene with interest.

"Karlstein!" I said to him emphatically.

"*Neen, neen!*" he grunted, and with a sweeping gesture indicated our group of passengers and luggage, "*Nit möglich!*" He thereupon pointed a dirty finger at his open mouth and began to masticate an imaginary meal.

"*Ja, ja!*" I argued, surprised at my own command of the language. And I in my turn began to chew and nod toward the three tragic figures behind me.

The driver brightened at the idea thus daintily conveyed. He pointed to a house just down the road, and clucking to his somnolent horse, turned the cart and departed, beckoning to us over his shoulder.

"Come on," I prodded Morgenstern. "He said we could get something to eat over there."

The little man gazed at me stonily. "He said nothing of the kind."

"Well, really," I flung at him, "you are a lot of help, I must say!"

By this time Madame had come out of her reverie. "Now what?" she croaked.

"Food!" I said, and took her arm. "I've just ordered lunch for us at that hotel. Let's go!"

She gave me a dazed and incredulous look.

"Well, Tinka, you have certainly taken on quite a responsibility!" She wrinkled her beautiful nose and began at last to laugh.

At this bright omen Morgenstern sprang up and Kathi lifted her doleful head. As if from nowhere, a railway official in cap and badge appeared and consented to guard the luggage; so our little procession started down the road to the farmhouse.

Here, to our surprise, a table was in process of being spread under a tree in the orchard, and a meal was actually ready. The kitchen was full of noisy farmhands and Kathi eagerly joined them. Presently, smart in a borrowed white apron, she reap-



peared bearing a steaming tureen of soup and *Knödeln*, a round loaf of black bread tucked under her arm. Fresh butter in a wet cabbage leaf was already on the table and we fell to. Potatoes and boiled beef followed the soup, and pancakes with jam. A child brought out enormous mugs of cold beer, but while I was allowed only half of mine, all the rest had two. The second was drunk in company with the farmer, a big, sweating man in high boots, smelling of fertilizer. He had come to discuss our problem.

It seemed that he owned two horses and a large cart, in which latter Kathi and our luggage could ride. For the rest of us, he would put sacks for us to sit on in the back of Morgenstern's original conveyance. There was only one difficulty! He shrugged, wrinkled his leathery brow, and spread his hands hopelessly in the grip of painful mental effort. This was quite insoluble! For of course his horses were working in the fields and would remain there until sundown, when, naturally, they would be much too weary for further duties.

At this point Morgenstern, much stimulated by food and drink, made an unexpected effort to cope. He leaned across the table and delivered a rambling and florid eulogy of the Fremstad career, letting drop here and there a hint of his own importance. I could see that the farmer believed no word of this, except for the irrefutable testimony of the eight trunks and fourteen valises which were even now provoking considerable rustic curiosity over on the station platform. At the end of every strophe Morgenstern repeated the dramatic appeal, "So, then what would you do in our place?"

The question burned itself into my brain. It was the first complete German sentence I was to learn by heart. Repetition finally got it fixed in the farmer's mind as well. His little eyes all but disappearing into his face with sly cupidity, he opined that if he were as important and rich as the *Herrschaften* appeared to be, he would offer the farmer enough money to make it worth his while to take the horses from the field. At this brilliant bit of logic Madame nodded impatiently but I could see

that she was furious; and another half hour was then spent in haggling.

Finally she got up from the table, flung the money for the meal into her plate, and wandered over to cool herself in the shade of a linden tree at the end of the garden while I remained to watch how arrangements progressed. At about two o'clock the cavalcade assembled. Madame sat on the seat with the driver of the cart; Kathi, Morgenstern and I on potato sacks in the rear. The wagon with the trunks preceded us at such a dizzy pace that there seemed imminent danger of its overturning. Madame urged our driver so desperately to overtake and stop it that our horse was prodded into a canter; and when the farmer on the big cart ahead heard the pounding of hoofs behind him he thought that it was a race and immediately entered with abandon into the spirit of the thing, exhorting his own steeds to ever greater effort. So we dashed into Karlstein (which proved to be only a few miles away) with all the excitement, clamor and flourish that the highest *Hoheiten* in Vienna could ask for.

En route Madame Fremstad had begun to question Morgenstern about the villa he was supposed to have engaged for us.

"Has it a nice balcony?" she asked.

"No, no balcony. The houses here do not have them," he had sulkily replied.

"But a *Lusthaus* then—surely a *Lusthaus* in the garden?"

Now I of course, with the rest of the world, had heard tales of the dissolute lives of theater folk, and had been on the lookout, ever since the boat sailed from New York, for any signs and portents. I had had to admit, however, that life with this particular star, while colorful and agitating enough, had remained up to the present moment conventionally moral. But "lust house"—that sounded a little more like it! I was quite disappointed when again Morgenstern shook his head.

"I'm afraid," he shouted, as we pounded through an ancient gateway, "that you may be just a little chagrined by the arrangements. It was very difficult for me, I assure you!"

We drew up in a cloud of dust before a low, vine-hung cottage, directly on the main street opposite an abattoir. An ancient hag came out to meet us, curtsied and mumbled something about the rooms being occupied. Madame Fermstad took a long breath and prepared to explode.

"You see, *Gnädigste*," the woman interrupted just in time, "these rooms have already been let for some months to four students in the cuckoo-clock school which does not close for the summer until next week. The gentleman did not tell me that there was any hurry. But they are agreeable boys, they will be glad to share with you. I will move all their beds into one room . . ." She suddenly frowned and her face went blank. "But then, alas, *Gnädigste*, there will be no beds for you!"

Morgenstern had meanwhile crept around behind Kathi and me, but Fremstad saw him and then and there—and high time too!—she told him exactly what she thought of him. The storm raged and crashed around us and I enjoyed every minute of it. Her voice rose higher and higher, demanding first of all his immediate consignment to the flames of purgatory where, between tortures, he could meditate on his responsibility for ruining her voice, her health, and probably her entire career! She ended hoarsely by a more realistic request for another villa, or even a hotel, or failing these and much to be preferred, the first train back to Vienna.

The villagers, who had been assembling during all these fireworks, now began to take part in the scene. There was no train—that on which we had come ran only twice a week. There was no hotel, just the tavern beside the slaughterhouse. But there might indeed be other rooms. Two women promptly came forward and began bidding avidly against each other for our patronage. In the meantime the farmer and cart driver, eager to be off to their evening chores, had begun clamoring for their wages. The pandemonium increased, and all we needed now was a full orchestra, and a ballet to come tripping on among the peasantry, so operatic and absurd had the whole thing become.

Suddenly Madame did a characteristic *volte-face*. She looked

up at the medieval ruin frowning on its rock above the town, she sniffed the fragrance blowing in from the pine forests beyond, and cocked an ear toward the splash of the River Thaya rushing beneath an ancient bridge nearby.

"Why," she exclaimed with childlike delight, "I'm beginning to *like* this place! There is something new here for me! We shall stay!"

The carts turned around and followed us up a little hill. There on a strip of village green, beside the communal pump, the eight enormous trunks and the fourteen valises were deposited, with Kathi perched on top of the pile talking importantly to a ring of village gossips. The drivers were paid and clattered off, Morgenstern with them; and Madame Olive Fremstad, the toast of two continents, and her young friend Tinka Watkins of Vermont, U.S.A., were left alone at what seemed the frontier of nowhere.

Both landladies were eventually satisfied, for we took both proffered apartments, separated from each other by the length of the village green. In the more modern of the two Madame and I were to reside, she in the parlor, I in the kitchen, beds being installed according to this strange plan. In the further house Kathi was to live and cook, her bedroom serving as dining room—a repulsive idea at best—when inclement weather should drive us from the garden. This far from satisfactory installation was further complicated by sanitary arrangements contemporary with the building of the castle on the hill; while the pump on the green or the River Thaya provided our only resources for bathing. Madame, however, was as gay as a lark. The mountain of feathers on her bed, the pail and wooden tub on the kitchen bench, and all the other dubious joys of this bivouac seemed to give her no concern, now that the matter was settled.

That evening we walked down to the *Post* and sent off an order to a neighboring town for a piano, which actually arrived two days later by oxcart. The trunks had been carried to shelter as soon as the Karlstein men came in from the fields that first

evening, and the better part of the two days was occupied with our desperate efforts to unpack and dispose the contents around our extremely limited quarters. Now I began to see the wisdom of the sheets and plates and cooking utensils we had brought with us, and as for the Carmen shawl, the leopard skin, the Sad Shepherd and the bronze "Musica"—they certainly looked very strange and uneasy in their new surroundings, but presently they worked their appointed miracle and we felt at home. With the arrival of the piano Morgenstern crept out of hiding and a schedule of work was as smoothly inaugurated as if this had been the Ansonia, or at least the Matschakerhof.



Karlstein proved to be a drab and dreary spot, once the novelty of our ridiculous situation had lost its charm—which it promptly did. There were almost no alleviations. We explored the castle, to find it a filthy rookery inhabited by gypsies like rats in a wall, its emblazoned oaken portals fouled with manure. The River Thaya, at the one spot where bathing was possible, was rank with stale soapsuds. Even the wild life was uncooperative. Walking one afternoon in the pine woods across the river we heard a bird singing, and Fremstad, recognizing, as she thought, a friend, attempted to converse with him in the language of Siegfried's *Waldvogel*. It was as pretty a performance as could be imagined and would have enthralled any but a Karlstein audience; but this callous bird would have none of it, said "Awk!" very rudely, and flew away. As for the human population; they were a black-browed and surly lot who regarded our mere presence, not to mention everything that we did, with suspicion and ill will. They hid their private lives in one-story huts of peeling stucco which lacked any picturesqueness or charm whatever.

"Well," said Fremstad to me on one of our nightly strolls, "at least they keep all their windows and doors shut, so the air is pure outside. We can be thankful for that!"

Kathi lasted ten days, which was a week more than I expected.

Her departure was followed by a hideous interim during which Madame took over and gave her all to concocting a series of meals which, although simple and good, were certainly not worth the nervous tension and the subsequent prostration each induced. As for me, I was no help at all. I had been very badly brought up, it seems. Eighteen years old and unable to cook! Madame Fremstad was shaken to her depths by such ignorance and soon had me starting the breakfast, such as it was. I did this by the simple expedient of leaning out of bed and touching a match to the wood stove which also served me as night table and bureau. Frequently I forgot to take my slippers out of the oven, the only place for housing them, and the smell of scorching leather mingled with the aroma of toast and coffee.

When our servantless state eventually grew desperate, the butcher, who alone in the entire village had shown us a spark of friendliness, produced one evening a slatternly little trollop called Phini, who had wandered from God knows where into his beer garden. We asked no questions and took her on at once. Actually, at first she was not so bad. The job, in spite of its many drawbacks, seemed like paradise to her and she served us with enthusiasm if not with skill. Her cooking was elementary, but so were most of the means at her disposal, and once we had presented her with a comb and a cake of soap she no longer took our appetites away. In fact we might somehow have endured the entire summer in this *Ekelhaftes Nest*, as Fremstad called it, had it not been for the fleas.

A few of these insects had sampled our blood shortly after our arrival, and finding the flavor both novel and pleasing, had spread the good news. Soon all their sisters and their cousins and their aunts hastened to share the feast, and finally not only whole families but tribes and nations came to devour us nightly in our beds as well as to enjoy hourly snacks during the day. When we complained, we were told that the Karlsteiners were not troubled by the pests. This was said in a manner implying that we only were of a grade low enough to appeal to scavengers. But Fremstad rose to this challenge.

"Hah, that sees itself!" she cried. "Now that they have tasted good meat your flavor is repellent to them!" Be that as it may, vinegar was said to be even less acceptable to the creatures. So we bought gallons of it from the local merchant (who had doubtless invented the story for his own profit), wrung out our sheets in it daily, and also bathed our persons in it so thoroughly that we were in grave danger of becoming pickled.

At last, after seven long weeks of Karlstein, Madame Fremstad got up one morning, found a flea in the breakfast butter, said, "*Basta!*" and "*Zu Viel!*" and "God help us!" and instead of working at her scales went down to the *Post* and sent off a secret telegram. Morgenstern arrived, and behind closed doors I heard him expostulating, and shortly witnessed his precipitous retreat. That afternoon the old Postwoman—no horn for her—toiled up the hill and brought us an answer to the morning's message. It said, in the stilted phraseology of Austrian deference, "Villa ready and awaiting the honor of your occupancy."

"Tinka," said Madame, becoming quite pink with happiness, "get out the trunks—we're moving to the mountains!"

## Chapter 7

THE KARLSTEIN EPISODE was not all gloom and absurdity, however, and I even bear its memory a certain affection for two very special reasons. First, it was in those sordid surroundings that, as we battled side by side against such unspeakable odds, my own relation to Madame Olive Fremstad underwent a change. All these weeks I had been merely the nice little girl with the funny name who on this, her first trip to Europe, was expected, but not really required, to make herself useful along the way. Now, suddenly, I was an apprentice in line for a junior partnership. From that time on Madame Fremstad always referred to

her work as "ours," and frequently during ensuing opera seasons would say something of this kind:

"Well, Tinka, we gave a good performance tonight!" or, "The entrance in Act III was false. We must remember not to hurry it next time."

At first I supposed this was the editorial or royal "we," but Madame argued that she considered me, in a sense, a colleague. Of course this was the sheerest nonsense, but it was potent flattery all the same, and nothing more was needed to cement a devotion in which art and the artist remained for me forever indistinguishable.

It was also there in the sandy little back yard, while together we were hanging the vinegar-dipped sheets on the bushes to dry one morning, that she bade me no longer call her Madame but simply by her childhood name of Livan.

"Livan means *life* in my language," she explained, "and it is a nickname for Olivia too."

I felt as if she had given me an unexpected and valuable present and I was inordinately proud. To use it was a special favor which I guarded jealously, and I never presumed upon the privilege in public.

Fremstad was forever concerned with names, and their implications. During the season of 1910-1911 she made an effort, on discovering that there were thirteen letters in Olive Fremstad, to have herself officially billed as Olivia. For a time she was so designated on every Metropolitan program, but the public was stubborn: she was Olive to them, and in vain might she argue, even with official proof in hand, that Olivia she had been born and christened.

This was really true; her baptismal name was Anna Olivia. Anna for her Swedish mother, Olivia for her father, the Norwegian Ole. Olive was fastened upon her by her Minnesota schoolmates when she first came to America and, as it seemed to suit her, it had clung to her even into professional life. Olivia had not. So important were such matters considered in those days that there were actually editorials about this in the papers



and reporters were sent to interview her and learn the reason for her break with established usage. One day Pitts Sanborn, writing on the New York *Globe*, and tired of filling his column with the protests of his readers on this subject, had an inspiration.

"There are, by the way, thirteen letters in the name of Richard Wagner!" he reminded her. Fremstad was impressed; thereupon she gracefully yielded to popular demand, and reverted to Olive for the rest of her public life.

It was in Karlstein, on our endless walks, that she told me something of her childhood. Her attitude toward the little, far-away Livan was tender and pitying—with reason too, for she had not had much fun—but toward other children whom she knew in later life, she was harsh and exigent. The very sorrows which broke her heart in her own early years she insisted, for their own good, others must taste. This inconsistency was one of the problems confronting all those of her friends who were parents. They argued with her that early hardships did not necessarily produce little opera singers, and that not every family would want one, anyway.

"I was a love-child, you know," she was fond of announcing, but just what she meant by this she did not explain. One had only to look at the portraits of her parents to see that here was no changeling. The broad cheekbones and sturdy shoulders of Fru Anna Rundquist Fremstad; the supercilious brows, the aristocratic nose, the blazing, deep-set eyes and the stern but sensual mouth of her doctor father, the Vikings' son, were in her reproduced feature for feature. I think that she felt keenly that she was different—as indeed she was—from her brothers and sisters, and had explained this to herself by remembering that she was the first child, the fruit of her parents' early love and vigorous young life.

Hers was a strange heritage. She told me a long and involved legend which, if true, would relate her to the Hohenzollerns and account to some extent for the regal bearing and autocratic manner she could so naturally assume. Her paternal grand-

father, it seems, had been a strikingly handsome young man, and during his military service was elected, because of his great height, to membership in the bodyguard of the king, an exclusive group of youthful Vikings, all of whom had to be over six feet two. During an official visit by Wilhelm I of Germany, father of the last Kaiser, to the Court of Norway, a certain Prussian lady-in-waiting, herself of the imperial blood, lost both her heart and her head to the charms of this beautiful young man and was very, very indiscreet. The result for her was banishment to obscurity and also an infant son—who would one day become Olive Fremstad's father. That is why, I was told, the Fremstads had been given the right to the prefix *von*, reportedly still in use by Norwegian cousins to this day. Whether this romantic tale is fact has never been established; other members of the family have always been skeptical. At any rate, Olive Fremstad always derived a good deal of satisfaction from it, and certain it was that when she went to Germany as a girl to study with Lilli Lehmann, she took to the Teutonic way of life, to its speech, manners, and ideology, as to those of an authentic Fatherland.

Ole Fremstad grew up to be a well-known physician and surgeon of Christiania, and eventually became the head of a flourishing clinic. His Swedish wife assisted him there as chief masseuse, a profession more highly honored in Scandinavia than here. Fru Fremstad went home to Stockholm to bear her first child, and thus it happened that eventually the famous baby could claim as her own either country or both, according to expediency.

But Ole Fremstad was more than a doctor; he was an extremely pious, strict and uncompromising Methodist. One day he heard the call, and in true Biblical fashion sold all his worldly goods. With his family—consisting of his wife, the twelve-year-old Livan, a son named Joseph, and a still smaller daughter, Marie—he took ship to America as missionary to the souls and bodies of his fellow countrymen who, pioneering without bene-

fit of clergy or medicine, were then settling the state of Minnesota.

The Fremstad family went to the little town of St. Peter which some twenty-five years later was to stage one of the most elaborate celebrations in the history of the state in honor of its famous daughter, who had once been the shy, tongue-tied little Livan. It has now grown to a small city, but it still remembers her with costumes, portraits and souvenirs of her career in the municipal museum.

Whenever interviewers begged Olive Fremstad to discourse upon her origins and her musical background, she always laughed, although without mirth.

"No one talked of such things that way," she would say. "We simply were musical, that is all—and every one of us sang and played as a matter of course. My father and mother both had beautiful voices, with the typical long Scandinavian range. We sang as naturally as we breathed; hymn tunes mostly, but my father's taste was fastidious; the classics also were familiar music in our household as far back as I can remember."

She loved to tell of her first public appearance, which took place in a small town near Christiania. There, at the age of three, she had gone with her parents to attend some sort of church sociable. She had been stood on a table top and urged to sing some nursery ditty, which she did with so much spirit that she was rewarded with the prize of a chocolate horse. Supposing quite reasonably that this was to eat, she promptly bit off the tail. But her mother thought otherwise—the trophy must not be enjoyed, just looked at and preserved. So little Livan was sharply rebuked and stood in a corner and her horse taken away. This baby tragedy always seemed to me symbolical of the triumphs which were to be hers in maturity; the heroic effort and the measureless joy in performance; the public acclaim; and then, inevitably, the frustration, pain and tears which were always the aftermath for the woman whose standards were sometimes too lofty for human attainment.

Soon the growing girl joined a band of "Young Christians" which traveled, singing, through the rural parishes of Norway—her first experience of "the road." She also delighted to help out at a sailors' mission near the harbor where her father often prayed and preached even before he gave up his clinic. It was here that she had her first glimpse of human misery, for often the derelicts frequenting this refuge had their hearts softened by the sight of this innocent child praying for them, and would sob out their sins on their knees before her.

One day her father asked her solemnly if she would like to learn to play the piano. At the mere thought of such a privilege she was too overcome to speak. She hung her head and the tears trickled down, melting the lump of joy and excitement in her throat. She managed to whisper shyly, "Oh yes, please!"

And thereupon her formal musical education was begun; and her legs being still too short for her feet to reach the pedals, blocks of wood had to be tied to her copper-toed shoes.

Dr. Fremstad was a stern, determined man. If his child wanted to be a pianist, then there was only one way—to substitute work for play. Somewhat later, in Minnesota, neighbors grew very excited over the case of the pale, thin little girl who was made to spend all her vacations, holidays, and hours after school relentlessly practicing scales and exercises, and her evenings bumping about in a farm wagon with her father and a portable organ to prairie revival meetings. She was the organist and led the singing too, and at times she was also expected, when sinners seemed reluctant about being saved, to start the procession of penitents to the altar. Good enough training indeed, for the dramatic future ahead of her, but hard on sensitive childish nerves.

(She told me once that whenever she sang Kundry she always remembered those old prairie services. "In fact," she declared, "I consider the whole opera *Parsifal* to be just a big elaborate revival meeting.")

The neighbors eventually complained to the local equivalent of the SPCC, but to no purpose, for Livan herself wanted to

practice; she liked to work and always did. (She liked almost equally well, when she grew up, to see others working, especially for her.) It was at this time that she began taking pupils. Her father thought that this might spur her on to greater achievements herself. Perhaps it did, but the monetary rewards were slight. One pupil, a grown man, paid his little teacher with a doll.

When the winter set in, however, the schedule was relaxed a little. She and her brother Joseph could skate and ski better than any other children in the town. These skills were apparently her only taste of fun for fun's sake and stayed by her all her life. Most of her other pleasures were required to bear some relation, even if incidental, to her career, otherwise they simply were not pleasures.

The subject of work returns me to Karlstein and my other reason for not blotting it forever from memory. I had there my first glimpse of artistic drudgery, the infinite pains which are supposed to be the secret of genius. Fremstad had no professional engagements that summer, nor any roles in preparation. But she evidently had vocal problems to solve—the reconditioning of a tired voice, the cleaning up of little careless habits and expediencies which had taken hold during the twenty-two gruelling weeks of the opera season.

Morgenstern may not have been precisely lovable but, functioning in his professional capacity of coach, one had to respect him, and Fremstad did.

“If it were not for that, Tinka, do you think that I would ever give him the satisfaction of following him here to this dung heap?”

Every morning, as punctually as the striking of the hundred cuckoo clocks in the factory school, he walked a kilometer or two from his own hamlet beyond the pines and sat himself down at the piano in the diva's bed-sitting room. I listened eagerly the first two or three times, expecting operatic arias, but

in all the seven weeks of our stay I heard none—only endless scales, arpeggios, vocalises, and sometimes for a half hour at a time, one solitary note, sung over and over again, tried this way and that, and finally perfected.

Because of the fleas and the general misery of our existence in Karlstein even this ritual eventually came to an end. In the middle of our frantic and exuberant packing on the last day, Phini completely disappeared and that evening we had to go down to the butcher's garden and have sausages and beer for supper. We imagined we could detect a sudden lack of cordiality in our only friend's manner as he served us, but we were quite unprepared for the revelation awaiting us at dawn the next day. That night we paid off our two landladies and various other accounts in town and, no Phini having returned, we put her money and her reference book (which in prewar Austria was always given into the keeping of the employer) on the kitchen shelf, and, all obligations discharged, went to bed with clear consciences.

The sun was scarcely up before a hubbub in the street outside our windows rudely awakened us. An assemblage of Karlstein's citizens, several with stones in their hands, had gathered at our gate, led by none other than our friend the butcher, who was also the *Bürgermeister*. His arm lay protectingly across the slatternly shoulders of the missing Phini, who was alternately crying and screaming imprecations. We dressed in seconds, and Madame Fremstad, who reacted to a scene like this as a war horse to gunpowder smoke, went out and confronted the mob in her best grand-operatic manner. I was terrified, for the hands holding the stones were twitching, but the crowd remained stunned by the pungency of her oratory long enough for the wagon—which had been summoned to drive us to Raabs, a railway town fifteen miles away—to reach our gate, and for our luggage to be loaded. There were mutterings as each enormous trunk was carried out and hoisted into the cart, but nothing actually happened except this fulminating crescendo of sheer hatred. I had never seen a mob before and never

want to again. Even one of such negligible size as Karlstein produced was a terrifying spectacle.

Phini, the instigator of it all, watched with sullen eyes, her cheeks flaming. It seemed that having heard via the village grapevine, although not yet from us directly, that we were leaving, she had leaped to the silly conclusion that she had not been told because we did not intend to pay her. It was only one step further to confide this suspicion to a neighbor, and in no time at all it was an established fact, and Phini had fled to the house of the butcher. Here the mob was already beginning to muster even while we sat so innocently eating sausages in the garden the previous evening.

When the excitement eventually died down a bit—with the discovery of the money and the book exactly where we had so punctiliously placed them—the crowd was reluctant to believe that there was not still some lurking skulduggery on our part. Several louts caught hold of our horses' bridles, loudly demanding redress for something, no matter what. Our driver sat shivering and helpless on his box, but Fremstad settled the whole thing with one magnificent gesture. She snatched the whip from its socket and laid it across the horses' flanks with stinging blows. They leaped into the air and started to run; the driver and I both fell backward into the cart; and the men at the bridles were hurled to the ditch. Lurching and plunging, we galloped crazily down the hill, through the dusty main street and across the Thaya bridge, while Fremstad, having caught up the reins, stood firmly there on that flying equipage like a Valkyrie, her hat off and the wind in her hair, calling triumphantly to every staring citizen we met: "*Nie wieder! Herr Je! Nie wieder!*"

She kept this vow and never saw Karlstein again. But in 1938, finding myself in Vienna, I was unable to resist the temptation and motored there with my husband, who had often heard this tale. We found that it had become a tidy village of pastel cottages with burgeoning geraniums in every window. The Thaya had a municipal swimming pool and a pretty *Gasthof* stood on the site of the old butchery. The ruined castle had been restored

and painted a cheerful cream color, its weedy *plaisance* was now a formal garden, but—and just what it deserved—a banner with a swastika was floating on the ramparts!

Madame elected to pause only briefly in Vienna after our escape. We had a single objective in view: a thorough and luxurious bath. So we went to the Bristol for the night, each had a tub, and successfully washed away the smell of vinegar. For years thereafter no salad had any attraction for me—one whiff of the dressing and I automatically began to itch.

Next morning, clean and shining, perfumed, shampooed, and with high hearts, we set out for the promised land.

## Chapter 8

BAD AUSSEE is a small watering place at the foot of the steep, but charming little Pötschen Pass, which leads over to the old Austrian Kaiser's vacation spot, Bad Ischl, and eventually to Salzburg. It was at that time completely unfamiliar to Americans and even now, in spite of international *tourisme*, remains almost exclusively the resort of the Viennese. It is set in the midst of the lake country, and although actually in Styria, forms a part of that lovely district known by the unlovely name of the Salzkammergut.

Madame Fremstad had a villa there—not her own, but leased for an indeterminate number of years. It stood on a plateau above the town and looked over toward the snow fields and glaciers of the Dachstein, that mild but handsome mountain beloved by the easygoing climbers of Austria. On the other side were the gray, sinister *Totesgebirge*, and near at hand a little *Horn* or two with cloaks of feathery larches about their shoulders, and high pastures where the peasants sent their grow-



ing boys and girls to watch the herds during the summer months. In those days the youths at these *Alms*, as their lofty huts were called, yodeled back and forth to each other across the valleys every evening in storybook fashion; and the sound of accordion and flute came down to us with their voices over the splash of the waterfalls.

Having once beheld this enchanted spot, the mystery of the Karlstein martyrdom deepened. Why, if one had the key to such a paradise on earth as the Villa Lerchenreit, would one deliberately spend a season in purgatory? I heard in my mind's ear again the single note sounding under Morgenstern's stumpy, patient finger—the controlled voice following and soaring and descending to soar once more. I heard the bluebottles buzzing, and the fleas leaping against our pillows at night; and then I looked from my window out over the pleached apricots, now in golden fruit, at the Dachstein in the sunset glow, and I knew at least why there are so few real artists in the world.

But Aussee was not entirely heaven. We had a certain number of creature comforts, but there was still no running water, and great wooden buckets were brought in for us from the spring-house each morning by the peasants who lived in a small cottage on the place. I heated bath-water in big copper kettles and Madame splashed about in a shallow tin tub she had imported from London. In the afternoons we walked up a hill to a tiny lake and took a glacial swim.

The villa had all sorts of rooms, furnished engagingly in peasant style, and in a huge painted wardrobe in the hall were a hundred sheets and feather-bed covers—white linen with red cross-stitching for us; practical checkered cotton ticking for the domestics, of which we had none! That was our chief difficulty. I was without talent in housekeeping. My principal experience in the kitchen at home had been—"Now run along, Miss Mary, please, and get out of my way!"

But I could make beds and arrange flowers with some degree of skill and soon added to these accomplishments the scrubbing of deal floors and the stewing of plums and apricots. The villa

orchard was full of these two fruits; we supped and breakfasted on them daily until I never wanted to taste either of them again!

We had no icebox other than the spring and the deep stone cellar. Milk, butter and eggs were brought us by the resident farmer, also baskets of parsley and chives, carrots and little white turnips. Madame cooked our evening meal with the same dread results as in Karlstein, but for midday dinner and *Jause* we walked down the road to a little mountain inn called Die Wasnerin—a charming place, with a pebbly beer garden under close-woven linden shade. The cuisine was limited to numerous varieties of *Schnitzel* and an occasional pork chop, but it was pleasant eating in the garden, and the fresh rolls and the beer were marvelous. I was now allowed a small mug all to myself and if I forgot to put the lid down, the waitress came and slapped it shut with a contemptuous bang.

Everybody, peasants and summer guests alike, wore the native costume, which in that valley was simple and charming, the originals of those ubiquitous and bastard creations we call *Dirndls* today. Madame had her own waiting there for her, together with a flowered red parasol and a *Lodenmantel* (that Oxford-gray woolen rain-cape worn by every self-respecting man, woman and child in all German-speaking countries). There were also special cross-stitched table covers and spreads, folding chairs, and a variety of canes and nailed boots. These were brought forth from a storeroom, and from our "homelike trunk" we took out only the bronze cupid and the Sad Shepherd. The rest of the stuff, Madame said, could now have a vacation.

The Villa Lerchenreit was not a chalet; beyond the borders of Tyrol there are few of these in Austria. It had no *Lusthaus* either, but it had a fine square balcony on which to sit, and it had sun-stained and carved clapboards of oak, and creamy plaster walls. An apricot tree looked in at my window, and a grapevine climbed to Madame's. Right beside the vine-hung

window she carefully placed, each night, a large silver hair brush. And the reason for it was this:

Sometime during the previous summer she had gone up to see an *Alm-Tanz*, one of those rustic affairs in which the chief attraction was the *Schuhplattler*, that sprightly peasant revel in which the men slap the soles of their feet and their own buttocks resoundingly as they whirl their bell-skirted partners around like tops. With her Madame had taken her pretty, buxom French maid. It seems to have been the custom—and probably still is—for the more romantic of the young swains to escort their girls primly home, wait around awhile in the bushes until all the lights were out, then climb on any handy vine or tree to welcoming windows. On this occasion a certain young man, smitten by the charms of the maid, had followed her home at a safe distance and watched below for the blowing out of the candle; but he mistook the room. He swung himself up by the grape trellis and scratched at closed shutters. One white-socked leg was poised ready to swing across the sill when suddenly, from between the slats protruded, as he thought, the polished muzzle of a revolver. When a deep contralto roar informed him in no uncertain terms of his error, he lost his balance and toppled in panic to the ground. He danced no more *Schuhplattlers* that year, nor were the grapes on the Villa Lerchenreit as plentiful as usual.

So the handle of the hair brush lay ready for any similar emergency forever after. I was a little chagrined that Livan did not think such defense necessary for me, so I threw my case-ment wide. But I also went promptly to town at the first opportunity and bought myself a complete *Dirndl* outfit. This, with my new hairdo, which consisted of braids crossed over a demure central part, I fondly hoped would prove a potent disguise for the little *Amerikanische Backfisch*; especially as my German, fostered in the shops and kitchens of Karlstein, had by now developed a fluency and native flavor of which I was not a little vain.

It was in Aussee that we met Dr. Wilhelm Kienzl and his

wife. He was quite a celebrated composer of that time, but his fame was largely local although his operas, *Der Evangelimann* and *Kuhreigen*, were both heard in New York without, I may say, setting either river on fire. Fremstad herself had created the role of Magdalena in the première of *Evangelimann* in Cologne when she was cutting her operatic teeth on the contralto repertory. Kienzl was a pretentious little man who fancied himself as a second Wagner. He furthered this illusion by dressing the part, complete with side whiskers and velvet beret, and he lorded it over the entire district adjacent to the Wasnerin. Across the road from the beer garden was his house, a little gingerbread domicile of three rooms under a steep and pointed roof. In this lived, beside himself, his fat and overanxious wife, once an opera singer in the provinces; his tired, sullen, but fanatically devoted maid, Sophie; and his enormous Saint Bernard dog, Tristan.

It could not possibly hold them all at one time, so Frau Kienzl sat in the beer garden and Dr. Kienzl found himself a little pine grove nearby, caused bench and writing table to be built there expressly for his use, and put up a painted sign saying "*Wilhelm Kienzls Hain—Zugang Verboten*," although it did not belong to him at all and he had not bothered to ask permission. Whoever the real owner was must have been perfectly content, even gratified, for today the grove bears a permanent marker. The proprietors of the Wasnerin have also delighted to honor his memory. The inn has been charmingly modernized, and there has been set apart a special "*Kienzl-Stube*" or barroom, decorated with musical motifs; and the little house, now a souvenir shop, bears a plaque and has been frescoed with scenes from his operas. Thus the prophet was not without honor in his own country, although as Fremstad used to point out, he had been extremely shrewd in establishing himself as the big frog in the small puddle.

Be that as it may, she enjoyed his society and would go over and talk shop with him evening after evening when, beside a lantern in the garden, he bent over the orchestration of his

*Kuhreigen*, placing the notes as carefully on the lines as if he were doing fine needlework. Sometimes he and his wife would go for an evening stroll with us along the moonlit plateau; he and Fremstad ahead, stopping every two minutes fast in their tracks to argue or emphasize some point in their talk. I would follow at a respectful distance with dear Frau Kienzl, who lumbered along in her elephantine *Dirndl* and told me long, involved tales which I only half understood, of her glamorous life in the theaters of Linz and Graz. One night, I remember, we passed a rather new villa with lighted upper windows flung wide, from which proceeded angry shouts, sobs, and the sound of blows. Heartbroken words were plainly audible to any listener, and our whole party stood transfixed for a moment in mingled horror and curiosity.

"*Du lieber Himmel!*" said Fremstad, "the poor woman!"

To my ears the woman seemed definitely to be getting the better of it, but Frau Kienzl turned away with a sad little shrug, and two tears trickled slowly down to the corners of her mouth.

"*Ach, so ist die Ehe!*" she sighed.

Fremstad joined her and put her arm over the fat shoulder.

"*Ja, freilich,*" she agreed, "men are brutes! Why," she continued dramatically, "they have no idea how we suffer! Even I myself—right in the midst of my season—imagine!—my fingernails have been red from the scratches on my husband's face!"

Frau Kienzl clucked sympathetically and they walked on together. This left me with the Herr Doktor, much to my embarrassment, for he rarely noticed my existence. But now he cocked a bushy eyebrow in my direction and said in mock sorrow, "Now the little *Fräulein* will be afraid ever to marry! A lucky escape perhaps."

But he must have found marriage better than that, for he was not long widowed before he consoled himself with another devoted helpmeet who spoiled him even more.

The score of *Kuhreigen* was completed while we were there that summer, and before it was shipped off to Vienna we were invited to a party in its honor. The inn had a huge attic ball-

room and here we, in company with such notables as the countryside of summer visitors could produce, were fed a magnificent meal of pheasant and American pineapple (rarest of luxuries to European gourmets) washed down with Tyrolean wine. After dinner we sat about with no other light than the candles on the piano, and heard the opera from end to end. Dr. Kienzl told the story in running *parlando* as he played, and occasionally he lifted his raven's voice in song. Fremstad sat beside him in a Paris evening gown, turned his pages, and hummed a little too. During an entr'acte while the composer almost disappeared into an enormous stein of beer, she played for herself and sang "Der Lindenbaum" while everybody wept; and then finished off with some little French songs by Fauré that she had begun to study. It was a lovely evening, and for the first time I exercised my social German, with some modest success.



The peasant family which took care of the Villa Lerchenreit—and actually owned it, if the truth were known—presented an interesting study. Dora the wife, then a woman of about thirty-five, might by her appearance have been mistaken for a duchess, and it was rumored that in fact she was—on the left hand. She came from a family which had long been attached to one of the great semi-feudal estates of western Styria. Her mother had been, so it was said, a cowherd's daughter who was taken into the *Schloss* kitchens as dairymaid, where she caught the eye of the gamekeeper's eldest son, employed in the stables as under-groom. As she was extremely lively and pretty, it was not long before she had also caught the eye of the *Graf* himself. She and the groom eventually were wed, but when their first child—the infant Dora—was born, her resemblance to the high-nosed, eagle-eyed tribe of castlefolk was so embarrassing that the young parents were quietly presented with a small freehold estate with farm buildings and a villa, lying a discreet

number of kilometers distant, and were instructed to settle and remain there.

So the little Dora grew up to become one day a landowner in her own right, for there were no more children. This was quite a dowry, so she was able to make a good marriage. She had two sons, but neither of them resembled her in the least, but were their honest, dull, but worthy father all over again. Dora, if she ever heard the legend of her origin, paid no attention to it! She was far too busy with the thousand chores, indoors and out, of her mountainside farm, to do much daydreaming. Her only problem was the villa, which she considered entirely unsuitable to her station, and she solved this thriftily by letting it to visiting gentry and moving her family to humbler quarters among the outbuildings. She never was anything but a hard-working farmer's wife. She wore wooden clogs on her feet out-of-doors and went shoeless within, as did her neighbors. Her clothes consisted of the local costume, with a respectable Sunday apron and shawl, and her proudest possessions were—like those of all the other housewives of the district—her linen sheets and her mountainous feather beds. She spoke dialect only, but she could write a fine hand and she liked to read. She could not help being intelligent. Neither could she help her looks nor her arrogant ways.

One terrible day while we were still at the villa, the pig butcher paid his annual visit to the farm and we were awakened by pitiful, almost human screams. We retired to the back of the house and shut all the windows, but only when Madame finally went to her piano and pounded out the "Ride of the Valkyries" were the horrifying sounds muffled. Some time later, assuming the poor creatures' agony to be spent, we let in some air and leaned from the window to view the morning. Below us on the path Dora was trotting happily by, her delicate wrists straining under the weight of two buckets of blood. Fremstad was European enough and gourmet enough to know that this meant sausage, but she still felt compassion for the pigs and

emphatically said so. Dora set down her buckets with care and pride, and smiled up at her distinguished tenant.

"*Ach was!*" she said. "Why, *Gnädige Frau* will be lucky indeed if she herself comes to so useful an end!"



Before we realized it, it was mid-September. The mountain evenings were chilly and the flower-crowned herds had come down from the *Alms*, and the flies increased. Most of the summer guests had gone back to Vienna, among them the Kienzls, and presently our own time came. I fell victim to an overwhelming depression, for this meant that my fantastic summer was almost at an end. The thought of the Vermont rectory fairly curdled my blood. However, on the evening before we left, with all the eight trunks packed and piled around us in the dear little salon, Livan sat herself down solemnly to talk to me.

She looked straight into my eyes with that incandescent gaze of hers and said, "Our vacation is now over, Matinka. We are going back into the world—a world about which you know nothing at all. You do not even know me, for when I am singing I am an altogether different person. People say that I am very difficult and not everybody understands me. I warn you, it is a lonely, hard-working life, but to me it is always beautiful, and if you would like to share it, I should be glad to keep you with me. For your self-respect I will pay you a little salary, and I will also see that you behave yourself. Your parents need not worry."

I must have looked frightened, even though it was the pallor of pure astonishment and joy, for she went on to say: "You mustn't believe everything you hear, either, child. I have no lovers—they interfere too much with work. I saw you start the other night when I said something about scratching a face. Such things are best forgotten, and I can promise you that you will never see me raise my hand to hurt a living creature."

She was right. I never did, and furthermore, I never saw her, no matter how "difficult" she certainly managed to be, lose an



inch of her dignity. She never threw things nor broke the furniture, nor kicked, nor screamed—as is the prima donna tradition. Her sharpest weapon was her tongue, and this she used mercilessly, often hurting herself most of all.

Parenthetically, the only violent gesture which Madame ever directed at me was mild enough and had a distinctly comic aspect, although it frightened my mother rather badly at the time. It was early in the season, the opera was *Die Walküre* again and my parents on a visit from Vermont had been given seats for the performance. Dressing Brünnhilde had involved those dreadful toe-tights—no one went bare-legged on a stage at that time—and a stitch had to be placed at every crossing of the long sandal straps. I was kneeling in front of one outstretched leg, the dresser was negotiating the other. I am sure that I was awkward; after all, in this world one doesn't have much practice fastening the sandals of goddesses, and I fear that I pricked this one rather badly. She twitched and the needle went in again and the bottle of liquid make-up which she was in the act of applying spilled all over everything. It was a tense moment, and an explosion would have been perfectly justifiable. But all that she did was to reach out a dripping white hand to my head and press it back so that I stared into her face.

"Look at me, Tinka, and try to remember that I am flesh and blood, if it is not too much to ask!"

Considering her extraordinary appearance, halfway through her job of operatic make-up, it almost was, but I suppressed the maddening desire to giggle which always plagued me in such situations, and completed my sewing without further disaster. Eventually I escorted her safely to the stage, full-panoplied and beautiful. But I forgot to look in the mirror myself, as I hastily removed my smock and ran out into the house to greet my parents during what remained of the intermission. My mother's eyes widened when she saw me and Father adjusted his spectacles with sudden concern. They and their immediate neighbors stared at me rather wildly but the house lights were

lowered before I could get near enough to speak. On my way back to the stage I encountered Mr. Gatti-Casazza, who promptly leaned against the wall and began to shake all over with his particular brand of silent laughter.

"*Sancta Sanctissima!* What is this new coiffure?" he demanded. I turned and glanced through the open door of Wotan's dressing room at a lighted mirror, and beheld my sleekly parted dark brown hair embellished with the complete print of a clutching, chalk-white human hand.

When we left Aussee, Dora and her family bade us farewell in the approved local fashion. First there were hand-kissings and tears on their parts and gifts of money on Madame's. Then we got in the carriage and a small niece rushed up to us with flowers—a towering pyramid of roses in a paper cornucopia for "*gnä' Frau*," a smaller bunch of field flowers and, alas, a bag of plums and apricots too, "*für's Fräulein!*" Then the fluttering of handkerchiefs from the steps, and, as the horse drew us further and further down the road, we looked back to see them all waving from increasingly higher levels of the villa. When we passed over the brow of the hill one of the boys was saluting from a position astride the ridgepole itself.

## Chapter 9

KARLSTEIN, Vienna, Aussee, Austria itself, were all behind us now, but our route to Paris took us through Munich, a place Fremstad could never resist, for it had been the scene of her first great triumphs; and many friends, admirers, and old colleagues were still there always hoping for her return. It was my initial glimpse of this endearing city and I fell in love with it at once, although the rainy season had already begun and its special

quality of penetrating dampness was settling over the town as a foretaste of the rigorous Bavarian winter.

On our first morning we went straight to the opera house and inquired for Mr. Arthur Rosenstein, a young American pianist who was engaged there as *répétiteur*. He was always a great Fremstad fan, and came rushing out to meet us in a whirlwind of enthusiasm, and later took us to lunch. He was full of racy news about opera folk whom they both knew, and as he was extremely witty and amusing always, Madame was soon in the best of all possible humors, and allowed me to have a full glass of Hofbrau beer, although it proved to be the only thing in Munich that I didn't like. As the gossip grew spicier, I listened with flapping ears; apparently the opera in this staid city was a nest of vipers.

I heard tales about the Herr Professor Anton Fuchs, and I was sorry not to see him. It was his vacation, so that privilege was deferred, but I had for some time been curious about him because Madame Fremstad always wore, or at least kept close about her somewhere, a ring which he had given her. It was a large cabochon garnet on a plain gold band, surmounted by the most engaging little golden fox, which, I understood, had once been the Professor's scarfpin. Fuchs was in his youth a baritone at Bayreuth under Wagner himself. Later he became stage director there and in Munich he directed the first performances at the Prinzregenten Theater, as well as much of the routine repertoire in the *Hofoper*. He was engaged to direct the first *Parsifal* at the Metropolitan and Fremstad owed a good deal of her fundamental stage technique to his coaching. That an even stronger attachment existed was persistently rumored. In any event she had great respect for him, and his picture was among the few that she gave place to in her music room. I met him two years later and was a little disappointed. He was not the romantic figure I had expected, although he was quite impressive with his bristling mustachios, his pompous manner, and his air of sublime indifference to any but his own concerns. He was touchy and intolerant, I understand, and very jealous of his

authority, but he knew his job supremely well. He ran into all sorts of trouble at the Metropolitan, where there was no such hierarchy behind the scenes as he had known in the European houses, and his departure was premature and stormy. His meticulous and peremptory notations still embellish the margins of the Fremstad scores of *Tristan* and *Parsifal*.

Mr. Rosenstein took a kindly interest in me, for some reason, and immediately decided that the best way we could possibly spend our one afternoon in Munich would be to visit the Alte Pinakothek and view, among the wonders there, the portrait of Fremstad as Carmen, painted by the distinguished Munich artist, Franz Stuck. After that he would collect some old friends at the hotel for supper and if anybody wanted to hear a performance of *Il Trovatore* at the opera, there would be a loge available.

We duly went to the gallery and I saw the portrait of a sultry, dark-browed creature who seemed very alien to the blond Wagnerian goddess I was accustomed to. This, the finer of the two Stuck "Carmens," presumably was destroyed when the Pinakothek was bombed in World War II. The other is privately owned in this country and is a far better portrait than the large painting which hangs in the Metropolitan Opera House today.

In the gallery I saw other things too, acres of wonderful paintings and sculpture, and in my rapture, or in my zealous efforts to sketch for Madame all the many objects she thought might be useful to her, I somehow let fall that silly scrap of colored tissue paper which was issued as claim check for our raincoats and umbrellas. When we were ready to leave, it was nowhere to be found, and the *Garderobier*, in true German fashion, refused to give us our belongings without it, although we identified them completely and—so long did the struggle last—they were presently the only garments left unclaimed.

In vain were all the impressive titles in Madame's galaxy of Bavarian admirers invoked. In vain did she scold and plead and remind this stubborn, bewhiskered functionary of what Olive Fremstad had done for Munich. She invited him to go and view

her portrait in confirmation, but he only shrugged and said he knew and cared nothing about art, only about coats and umbrellas. Fremstad seized upon this admission to insist that he should therefore be dismissed from his position in an art gallery and that she would, immediately upon reaching her hotel, pull the proper wires to effect such an end. I privately thought this quite the wrong angle of attack, for in face of that particular threat he might never let us get away at all. But I was wrong. His sly little eyes gleaming with malice, he touched a bell and bade a lesser functionary escort us to the door; it was the hour of closing and the staff wanted their evening beer.

So we had to leave the coats and umbrellas for Rosie and the police, and the Prince Regent himself if necessary, to retrieve for us later. We were forced to go unprotected into the dismal, storm-drenched street and to wait, moist and desperate, for a passing cab. I was too abject to offer any excuse at all; and to make matters worse, Madame, as soon as she got home and was able to speak between shivers, unexpectedly sided with the *Garderobier* who, she said, did no more than his duty and was obviously a very trustworthy employee. The situation grew too tense for either a supper party or the opera to be considered and Madame took to her bed, announced that she was going to have a severe cold and thanked me cordially for it.

Although our possessions were restored to us next morning accompanied by elaborate apologies from on high, and a large conciliatory bouquet of dahlias, the cold also arrived—just as she had said it would, and it was genuine enough to be alarming. Rosie came over for lunch and comforted me as I wept into my plate. He assured me that she would have had a cold anyway—all singers did the instant they got to Munich—and that I had not, as I dolefully believed, put an end to her career. He called in a doctor, and from him I learned the words *Erkältung* and *Schnupfen*, which were to haunt me with fear and dread for the next seven years. It was two days before we dared so much as open a window and two more before we could proceed on our journey.

The incident of the portrait and our period of duress in that stuffy hotel room also served to incubate a flock of Fremstad memories, mostly concerned with *Carmen*. This role, dropped from her repertoire quite early in her Metropolitan career—an omission never adequately explained—was actually one of her most striking impersonations and had brought her enormous acclaim in Germany where the sort of thing Olive Fremstad did on the stage always produced a delicious shock. The leading papers of Cologne, where she made her debut in the part (and, judging from early photographs, hammed it shamelessly), became quite hysterical with pleasure that such a hitherto obscure little member of the local company should thus burst forth in splendor. Munich, hearing reports of this sensation, presently reached out a greedy hand and grabbed her for its own.

Here she became almost inseparably identified with the part; and many years later, at the height of her Wagnerian reputation when she returned there to sing *Isolde* and the *Ring* at the Prinzregenten Festival, the public still retained its early impressions firm in its inflexible German mind, and greeted this innovation with skepticism. She had the uncomfortable feeling that they expected her to accompany the “*Liebestod*” with castanets, and one critic actually accused her of doing a *danse de ventre* at that sublime and lyric moment.

She was, in those early years, the special darling of the dashing young army officers. They stood stiffly at attention in their brilliant uniforms with enormously high collars, outside the stage door on *Carmen* nights and, when she emerged, clicked their heels and tossed over her head a shower of roses, from which it is hoped they were thoughtful enough to remove the thorns. They also performed for her benefit the time-honored prima donna ritual of detaching the horses from her carriage and propelling her and her masses of flowers through the streets, prancing between the shafts themselves, pushing and whistling and singing. I suppose she threw garlands of kisses and that later they drank out of her slipper—“*Hoch soll sie leben!*”—and

their orderlies dragged them suddenly home in the dawn still babbling, "*Ach, süßes Olivchen!—liebe Carmencita!*"

The recollection of so much glamour made the maturer Olive's *Schnupfen* worse for a moment as her eyes moistened with sentiment. She sniffed and blew, and then smiled through her tears at still another memory.

"But this which I am about to tell you, Tinka, is more exciting still, even tragic. You must not whisper it abroad even now, for the man was very highly connected. You will be surprised!"

My capacity for astonishment had long since waned, but it was a fascinating tale. It seems that a certain officer—of course the handsomest and most exalted in rank among them all—had conceived for her a serious passion and besought her favors. She put him off so cleverly that in the end he actually proposed marriage; but already at that time she was wedded exclusively to her art. She sent him a polite but very firm *Nein!* whereupon he became, after the manner of his caste, truculent and overbearingly insistent. He did, however, think up a rather new angle. Every time his *Olivchen* sang *Carmen* he sent to her dressing room a sheaf of lilies and a black-bordered invitation to her own funeral. He then established himself in an aisle seat, first row center, his monocled eye gleaming and a pistol in his right hand aimed at her heart throughout the entire performance. She could see him quite plainly and it must have been distracting to say the least. But it happened with such regularity that eventually she became used to it; and in moments of special bravado she would come down to the footlights—where she quite realized that she was the perfect target—and sing her insolent music straight at him. There was no appropriate end to this story; he shot neither her nor himself, nor did she succumb to his pleas or his threats.

"He was too important a personage—I could not protest," she murmured fondly when I asked her why on earth she put up with such nonsense. But I never learned his name. Actually, one of her Munich rivals did her far more harm, and effectively

removed her from at least one performance, by sending to her dressing room a dose of sneezing powder concealed in the creases of a note.

Death and destruction seem associated with the Fremstad Carmen. One of her last appearances in the role took place in San Francisco on the evening preceding the famous earthquake of 1906. She told me about it many times for it was probably the most dramatic experience in a life replete with drama, but it was in that Munich sickroom that for the first time I heard the full story.

Fremstad, then a bride of only a few days (she had married Edson Sutphen secretly in Salt Lake City, when the company passed through there on its way west) was billed to open her San Francisco season with Caruso in *Carmen*, and did so on the night of April 17. It is curious to read the reviews of this performance duly filed by the critics and duly emerging from the presses, yet containing no premonitory hint of the disaster pregnant in the coming dawn. The singer herself claimed that she "sensed" something, felt an odd depression and lethargy. She said that she had to lash herself into her work and found it very hard to sing.

Be that as it may, her Carmen that night evidently shook the town in its own way. Not everyone liked it—she was too realistic a gypsy, and Calvé's arch antics were considered standard in those times. Something so new and different was rather upsetting. However, there was, according to the press, great and lively discussion during the intermissions: "Little else was talked about in galleries or boxes but the stunning impact of this latest conception of the role." As a conversational topic it was speedily doomed, however, for a cataclysm of nature a few hours later effectively replaced opera on the tongues of San Franciscans then and for decades to come.

No printed record discloses what her bridegroom was doing during the exciting hours of his wife's escape from the doomed city, nor did she ever mention him in that connection. Perhaps he remained shyly in Salt Lake City, or far more likely it was



his purse, fat with the yield of the Tierra del Fuego gold mines, which bought the horses and wagon which eventually delivered her, her maid, her costumes and all her luggage safely to the Oakland ferry. This was accomplished by passing through the devastated streets of Chinatown where, she recalled, the usually lethargic and inscrutable Chinese were running about in panic, their blackened faces streaming with blood—or were simply lying dead in the road.

It is difficult to thread a reasonable way through the excited dispatches which reached the New York papers. Some stories had Olive Fremstad ignoring her own safety completely in her zeal for helping to care for the wounded. Others claimed that she spent her full *cachet* of the evening in their behalf, for medicine, bandages and food. In an interview she neither confirmed nor denied this, but did add, with disarming honesty:

"I had received an enormous bunch of roses at the performance and when the façade of my hotel \* began to collapse and I was forced to slide wildly down the stairs from which the banister had just been shorn away, I began to think about those wonderful flowers and long desperately to save them. I blush to remember that I actually sent a porter back to get them, but later I was glad that I did for I distributed them to the injured who were lying on the grass of the little park across the street, and I know they were quite a comfort to them."

Comfort perhaps, but romantic souvenirs more likely. One wonders how many of those roses still exist, turning to fragrant dust between the pages of San Francisco dictionaries, but once displayed as proudly as were the historic scars from earthquake wounds and burns.

Although the losses of the Metropolitan in scenery, costumes and luggage were colossal, no member of the company was hurt. Fremstad herself lost nothing, not even her nerve, for she seems to have behaved with good sense and comparative calm.

\* This was St. Dunstan's on Van Ness Avenue, not the Palace where the majority of the company was housed and where such famous incidents took place as Caruso's rushing through the corridors sounding his high C to make sure it was still there.

Her ministrations to the victims could not have been very prolonged for she and another singer, Josephine Jacoby, were the first of the refugees to reach New York and the eager arms of the press.

Olive Fremstad sang one more Carmen at the Metropolitan on February 2 of the following season, but it was a lackluster and—unusual for this artist—an indifferent performance.

"It reminded me too vividly of my horrible experiences when I sang the role on Earthquake Night. I will never sing it again, so help me!" she told her friends and critics. This was a graceful excuse for withdrawal: although the press had hailed her impersonation with rapture, the American public never really liked her in this role. The morning papers contained polite valedictories, no more. Fremstad was having sensational difficulties with Salome just then, and so her Carmen passed into history.



Paris, which I had been looking forward to ever since we bypassed it so casually in May, proved to be unmitigated hell. We stayed at the Hotel Continental, which was luxurious enough but noisy, and the expense of our suite seemed to distress Madame who, almost immediately on crossing the French frontier, became seized with a strange spasm of thrift. From morning to night she haggled with whoever came her way, from the taxi driver to M. Poirret himself. On our arrival our first concern was to pin on all her coat lapels the little purple ribbon of her French decoration, "*Officier de l'Instruction Publique*," which had been bestowed in recognition of her performance of Salome at the Paris Opera in 1908. It seemed to me quite a gesture on the part of *la Patrie*. Anyone who could actually instruct the already sophisticated French public in behavior such as that of Herodias' daughter had indeed earned a medal!

The other fourteen trunks which had been dispatched from the Villa d'Este so long ago, were waiting safely at the hotel and had to be coped with thoroughly before we did anything

further. As soon as their contents had been spread out and examined for the hundredth time, the rest of our days were spent almost exclusively with *couturiers*.

With the undeniable advantage of a decoration on her chest, Fremstad played one famous house against another, walking out of so many establishments in high dudgeon that I began to fear that there would be no more left. But hers was a practiced technique; there was always voluble rejoicing among the *vendeuses* when she condescended to return—as she inevitably did—and prices magically decreased. There were endless and exhausting fittings which tried everybody's souls. Fremstad always had an uncanny gift for line and form, and I used to watch her, fascinated, as she snatched the material from the trembling hands of the fitter, and with a pin here and a length of velvet there, created, under the admiring eyes of the assembled staff, gowns and cloaks for herself which later went out with the label of the house as among their best models.

The sudden concern for thrift was rampant at every *essayage*. Madame would raise her shoulders one at a time so high that the material was wrenched from its moorings at her waistline.

"Longer—longer!" she would cry. "I am not one of your dumpy South American clients! Give me more material, I tell you!"

It soon became apparent that she did not need the additional inches she bullied from them; the bodice would inevitably blouse over too much and at the final fitting she would order it taken in. "*Mais ne coupez pas un seul petit centimètre!*" she would caution them, eyeing with approval the wide seams resulting.

I asked her once why she went through this game of shoulder hunching which always necessitated so many extra fittings, and she laughed. "Those Parisian cutthroats! It amuses me to make them give me the extra stuff . . . I can use it, you will see!"

But for once she was wrong. Many years later, when she no longer needed anything, one of her largest trunks was found filled to the brim with neat little rolls of everything she had

ever bought in Paris, carefully dismembered, labeled, and storage costs paid; an accumulation never used by anyone.

In addition to these tactics, there was the eternal demand for "*prix d'artiste*" which she usually got; and even I was awarded a modest blue *tailleur* which she wheedled out of Linker & Cie. for me, as a sort of by-product of her rights. *La petite* was a member of the diva's entourage, was she not? *Alors!*

We rarely ate at the hotel, but even after the most exhausting days, we pounded the side streets of the Left Bank in search of *bistros* which served dinners at minuscule prices.

"Paris is the one place in the world where you can eat both cheaply and well, Tinka, and we had better take advantage of it," she would explain.

Toward the end of our sojourn when even her winged feet grew weary, we pulled in our belts another notch and I shopped frugally on the Rue St. Honoré for rolls and cakes, cheese and fruit, and we picnicked in our room.

We never went out at night, we were too fatigued. Besides, Fremstad detested French opera. When she first heard *Pel-léas et Mélisande*, she admitted that she "understood no more at the end than at the beginning."

Privately, I think that she detested everything French, although the food and the clothes drew from her grudging approval. The language always bothered her too. Her ear was faultless of course, so her accent was good, but she mixed her vocabulary with Italian, and I am certain that the soft nuances and elisions of the speech were alien to her nature and basically irritating. But nothing would induce her to speak a word of English.

"If you let foreigners talk to you in *your* language, Tinka, it puts you at an immediate disadvantage!" she instructed me.

I found it maddening to be in Paris and see nothing but fitting rooms. I used to lean from my window and gaze over the Tuileries Gardens to the Louvre, whose famous insides I feared I should never behold. Madame had had some belated compunctions in Florence, but Paris was quite different; to her it was

simply a big factory, a kind of workaday prelude to the opera season. I don't think it ever occurred to her that it might hold any attractions for me other than what her interests supplied.

So the date of our sailing advanced without notable event. I had much to ponder, when packing and fittings and early bedtime left me at last free to invite my soul. I had written to my parents from Munich of the offer Madame Fremstad had made me, and in the last days before we entrained for Cherbourg their answer came. Just as I expected, it was full of worry. Traveling abroad for a summer vacation with a famous opera star was one thing, but a permanent attachment for their ewe lamb, especially in the dubious world of the theater, was quite another. However, both of them said very sensibly that it was futile to discuss this by mail and that we would have a good long talk when I came home. Home? Already my allegiance was dividing. All across the Atlantic my conscience prodded me about my parents, but not sufficiently to alter my decision.

On the last day in Paris two new recruits joined our party. One was a *femme de chambre*, pretty, young and fresh from the convent, who had been supplied by the concierge and who faced the dangers ahead with a fortitude born of ignorance and native Gallic *esprit*. She was not long with us; she fled in fright and bewilderment to the bosom of an aunt soon after reaching New York. But the other person to join us, and I use the word *person* advisedly, although she was only a little black dog of questionable lineage, was Mimi, and she remained with us for the length of her faithful life.

Wandering about late one afternoon in search of provender for our supper, I had seen her in a kennel window, her basket labeled *Occasion!* Her bright, appealing eye met mine and she rose from her cushion and came toward me, wriggling and smiling. She had, somewhere in her background, a Pomeranian forebear; she had the pointed nose and ears, the delicate prancing feet, and the curly tail, but her ruff was meager and the

length of her torso a scandal. I carried her to the hotel in a box out of which she promptly ate her way in order to reach my face with her tongue and lick a moist thanksgiving.

My instinct in making this purchase had been sure and true. Madame Fremstad was sitting up sadly in bed reading a French Bible when I came in, and she could not have been more surprised, but she opened her arms as naturally as if a little dog was just what she had been expecting, and took Mimi into them then and there for keeps. From that moment on, this little *Pariser Frauenzimmer*, as Madame lovingly called her, was her constant and inseparable companion, and was even a "bridesmaid" at her second wedding.

The voyage home was almost blank; we struck the autumn storms almost at once and even Mimi was seasick. I was not, and I prowled the wet and empty decks gloomily disputing with my conscience while Madame and her dog consoled each other. There were no other celebrities on board, or if there were, they languished in retirement too. Although on the last day the sun came out, and the waves subsided a little, Madame kept to her cabin until land was actually in sight. She hated and feared the sea, in spite of her Viking blood. Perhaps this was due to one of her life's great misadventures. On an earlier voyage, disturbed by the motion at dinner, she had sought the deck for fresher air. As she stood there alone by the rail, one of those sudden and inexplicable waves dreaded by all experienced seafarers rose and engulfed the ship. It swept away part of the rail where she stood and left her drenched and clinging for her life to what remained of the twisted iron. Two sailors saw her and ran over just in time to pull her back before she lost her grip. This dramatic incident was front-page news in all the New York papers and made of her arrival a field day for the reporters, but it took place on the steamer *La Provence* and did nothing to augment her already feeble enthusiasm for things French. Thereafter she traveled on the German ships where she felt more at home anyway.

## Chapter 10

So now it was New York harbor again, and I stood looking on it with anxious eyes. The reporters had come and gone and Madame Olive Fremstad, suddenly invested with a personality which I dimly remembered, had just dubbed me "Buffer" and given me a life's work. I caught sight of my parents in the crowd on the dock and winced. But their faces were glad and loving. Everything was going to be all right.

The Metropolitan Opera Company was also represented on the dock. Mr. William Guard, whose function was public relations, had prepared a suitable welcome at the gangplank, and, tossing her keys to me, Madame went off blithely with him in a taxi accompanied by several hand-picked gentlemen of the press. I was left to inaugurate my buffing career in company with the French maid whom I scarcely knew by sight, so susceptible to *mal de mer* had she proved to be throughout the voyage.

I should never in the world have engaged Germaine had I been consulted; a more bird-brained and feckless individual I have rarely met, but she served two useful purposes that day. She was so very foreign and chic, so touchingly bewildered and tremulous whenever there was a tray to lift or a box to open, that the customs officer softened visibly. I am sure that the ease with which we passed through the ordeal was due as much to her as to the astute chaperonage of Mr. Judels, who was representing the Opera Company in these matters.

Germaine's other function was to allay by her mere presence my parents' suspicions that I might have become, among other things, the diva's maid. They were hovering on the edge of the scene like a pair of anxious robins watching a fledgling, and

during the inevitable delay when the two once-empty trunks were found to be overflowing with highly dutiable articles and Mr. Judels had to enter the fray professionally, we had a little time to chat. Of course we all three carefully avoided the one subject uppermost in our minds, but when they finally left they had wrung from me a reluctant promise to spend at least a week in Vermont before the opera season should open and swallow me up.

Germaine and I joined Madame at the Hotel Astor which she had selected for the first whirlwind days of her stay because so conveniently near the opera house. I saw little of her, however; her prophecy was already coming true, she had changed almost overnight. It suddenly seemed a little pert of me to continue calling her Livan, for she was now Madame Olive Fremstad of the Metropolitan Opera Company—none other. Dashing off to a dozen engagements, interviews, rehearsals, and sittings at the photographer's, she wore the fabulous Paris clothes over which we had sweated so much blood, made herself up with hour-long care, submitted to the daily ministrations of a masseuse, a manicurist, and a coiffeur. Germaine was supplied with enough needlework, taken from a "sewing trunk" which now mysteriously joined the other twenty-two, to keep her out of mischief, but whenever she dared, she leaned from the salon windows high above Times Square, wringing her hands and muttering, "*O bon petit Jésus, protège-moi!*"

Mimi and I, however, were occasionally permitted to accompany the diva on her high-tension errands, and the thing I loved best of all was a rehearsal. Those in which Fremstad took part just then were private affairs held with piano in such oddly inappropriate spots as the Ladies Parlor or the Restaurant. These, presumably, were in the nature of refreshers only, for her first two performances of the season were to be in familiar, well-fitting roles: Brünnhilde, in Philadelphia, and Isolde, in New York. But there were stage rehearsals of other operas going on all the time, and for hours on end, while Madame labored elsewhere, I would sit there in the dark auditorium with Mimi



panting on my lap, dreamily wallowing in the delicious strangeness and excitement of this new world.

One afternoon, less than a week after our arrival, we were threading our way through the group of home-going artists in the stage door lobby when we were hailed by my Montreal acquaintance, Herbert Witherspoon, and his attractive first wife, the sister of Rupert Hughes, the writer.

"Where are you living? Do you want an apartment?" they screamed at us above the clatter of foreign tongues all about. It appeared that there was a splendid opportunity—a furnished sublease right in the building where they lived. It sounded very grand and suitable.

"Two or three maids at most could run it," they said casually.

Fremstad looked at me.

"Tinka *likes* responsibilities! How about it, kid?" I nodded; I thought it would be wonderful.

Apparently there was to be no question of the Ansonia again. We went up to investigate the apartment next day. It was somewhere in the nineties, near West End Avenue, and the building was new and a little pretentious. In fact it was so very new that the walls still oozed with moisture and there was the smell of paint, plaster dust and workmen heavy on the air. Nevertheless we took it.

The rooms were large, the furniture would have been appropriate to a stage set for *Don Carlos*, and there were enough baths for everyone, including a special boudoir for Mimi. Here I installed my prima donna, with Germaine fluttering about vaguely, and, by a streak of great good luck, my grandmother's old Irish cook, who, assisted by a little greenhorn niece, promised to look after things for me until I returned from Vermont. Madame was inclined to sulk at the thought of thus being left "completely alone again" as she pitifully described this populous household. But as she saw the reasonableness of my visit—and no doubt foresaw the ultimate benefit to herself—she kissed me good-by with a good deal more cheerfulness than I was able to achieve. I tore myself away full of more cares

and anxieties than the old-woman-who-lived-in-a-shoe, with endless last-minute injunctions to everyone, including Mimi.

Things were gathering momentum in New York by the time I got back. The first Fremstad performance was a fortnight ahead, and so much had happened and continued to happen that I felt dazed. The only member of the entourage I had left there who was still on hand when I returned was the dog. Germaine, of course, had collapsed at the first strain and fled, and even Irish Mary had packed up herself and her niece and departed in tears on the very morning I was expected back. Fremstad told me later that the poor distracted thing had wandered about the apartment crossing herself and keening "Holy Mother! I've got only the two hands and the two feet!" To which the singer, entirely missing the point, had replied reasonably, "Well, who has any more?" Deciding that of course the woman was mad, she had bade her leave.

Still blissfully ignorant of this situation, on my way up from the station I stopped at a florist's for a home-coming gift, my eye attracted by an ivy plant which had been prettily trained over a wire globe. This green ball in its white pot and red ribbon I purchased for more than I could afford and carried gaily along with me, convinced that I had selected the one perfect greeting.

My repeated ring at the front door remaining unanswered, I let myself in with my latchkey and proceeded through an ominous emptiness to Madame's room. I found her elaborately established on a chaise-longue staring gloomily into space. She turned on me a dull gaze with scarcely a flicker of recognition. A little uneasy, I tore the wrappings from my ivy ball and held it toward her with a conciliatory smile.

"Grüss Gott, Livan!" I stammered. "*Bin wieder da!*"

Then quite without warning and uttering no sound, she erupted from her mound of pillows, blankets, and furs, and with a stride and gesture worthy of the outraged Isolde, Act I, snatched my offering brusquely from my hand. Another great step took her to the window and, with what seemed like one

continuous motion, she swept aside the curtains and flung up the sash. Then, without a moment's hesitation, and no concern at all for whoever might happen to be strolling in the street nine stories beneath, she tossed the plant and pot straight into the outer air. She closed the window, dusted off her hands and flopped back among her pillows, all without a sound. But the atmosphere around her crackled, and Mimi ran under the bed.

Madame just sat there breathing hard and glaring at me, but presently she found her voice and it was impressive.

"Ivy!" she cried, "she brings me ivy—right at the beginning of my season! Don't you know that ivy means death? Thank you, Tinka, thank you very much!"

It took me some time to digest this incident, and even more to convince her of my innocence, but eventually I was shriven and blessed, and retired to the kitchen to salvage from the ice-box some sort of a luncheon for the three of us.

That afternoon I started on the long, long trail to the employment offices, a treadmill which had no end. In a diary which I kept at the time, the agonized repetition of entries such as "Katie left, Lena came. Hope!" were always followed a few pages farther on by "Lena left" . . . and probably, "Cooked dinner self. Failure." These incidents were given as much importance as any mere "*Götterdämmerung*, eve. Good." and clearly indicated my confused state of mind.

The servant problem was then and always the number one barrier to peace, and I attacked it, blunderingly, of course, because of vast inexperience, but with tenacity and purpose. Soon my microscopic salary began to melt in bribes and rewards, but still the endless procession continued. It was not that Madame was ever really unkind to her servants; many of them admitted that when they first came they thought they were in heaven, what with free tickets to the opera and similar perquisites. The trouble was quite simply that she expected them to forsake the world and give their souls and hearts exclusively to her career. She could never understand why, for instance, any cook should object to preparing a hot, full-course meal in the middle of the

night twice a week, if it were to be eaten by an artist who had just given a fine performance of Elsa or Brünnhilde.

"If I can do my big job, is it too much to ask that she does her little one?" she would rage. With fiery logic she exacted the same standards of perfection from those who served her as she considered the public and the Metropolitan Opera Company were entitled to expect from her, and she would make no compromise. When some baffled and tearful employee would plead, "But I'm doing the best I can, Madam!" the singer would protest in tones of contempt, "*Pfui!* You should be ashamed to put such limitations on yourself!"

She always lived up to her own ideals; she never ceased her own labor of polishing and perfecting, and she met her personal reward in the grim challenge of more and harder work the further she progressed. But the domestic temperament refused to subscribe to such obvious folly, of course, and there was no common ground.

As soon as the staff was momentarily complete again, I turned my attention to matters pressing me at the opera house; in other words, the dressing room, the wigs, costumes and such details as were now, it seemed, to be in my charge. The star dressing room at the Metropolitan, in common with those of most American theaters, was unattractive. The bare, none too spotless walls were furnished with several large mirrors, a shelf or two, borders of harsh, unshielded lights, and a row of hooks. The most important item of furniture, the piano, had a battle-scarred and weary air. There was a nondescript carpet, two tables, a plain green sofa, and a pair of cane-seated stage chairs. At one end was an uncurtained window with dingy, opaque panes, and against the opposite wall an ancient marble basin and a retreat, imperfectly disguised by a truncated partition.

It seemed incredible to me that this apartment, viewed in the cold light of a workaday morning, could be the anteroom to

Walhalla. Fremstad herself had never been reconciled to it although she had put up with it and its twin, No. 11, for eight seasons.

"Tinka," she said to me one morning, "I want you to go down and decide what can be done with the place. You should see it when Madame Alda sings! She has it fitted up for herself like a Parisian boudoir. As for Geraldine Farrar, she even has her own little private room which no one else may use (of course I wouldn't want it—absolutely no ventilation!). But it is a *bijou*, I tell you! And only think, Tinka, these artists sing trifles like Manon or Nedda or Marguerite—but for Fremstad and Isolde anything is good enough! Why, it is an insult to Wagner as well as to me!"

She spoke with such bitterness that I was shocked. That such things can matter so much in the theater is always a surprise to the layman, who is not often so frank even to himself, about personal prestige. But to the artist, especially to that one who has fought along each inch of the road to success and finally stands on the summit, the material evidences of this conquest are the necessary bulwark against the terror which lurks on the downward side.

An appropriate dressing room for Isolde was, I soon saw, impossible to achieve. Nothing could convert it into a Gothic bower. I compromised with English chintz, and the current lady's maid and I labored feverishly late into the night in order to make curtains and slip covers in time for the opening performance. The good old "homelike" leopard whose traditional lair was the couch lent a somewhat alien note to the décor, but I ignored that; he had to be there. The white bearskin, on the other hand, seemed quite in keeping. We had bought some new toilet articles in Paris, and some glass trays for the make-up, and altogether I thought that it looked very nice. Everything had to be made so that it could go up and down in a hurry and could be packed with ease and taken home. When all was in readiness on the evening Madame Fremstad was to sing her

first Isolde of the season, I stood trembling with eagerness to see her reaction. She swept in rather casually I thought, but seemed on the whole pleased, although pardonably distrait.

Her arrival was made in the traditional manner, swathed in furs with a thick white veil over her face and hair. This latter was an affectation designed to tantalize the curious who always collected about the stage door and who must never be allowed to see her clearly without her war paint.

It was a nice touch. Equally impressive was the burden of assorted suitcases, boxes and baskets which were rushed out ahead of her in the hands of chauffeur and retinue at the finish. This paraphernalia had all gone down to the theater with me an hour or so before Madame's arrival and it was my job to have everything unpacked and under control by that time. Costumes and their proper accessories must be hung on the row of hooks in the order of their appearance, tights and sandals laid out on chair and rug, the wig on its stand, *onduléd* and brilliantined, the hand mirrors and powder and rabbit's foot, the sticks of grease paint on their trays, the candle and little saucepan ready for melting the lash-black (this was before the vogue of eye-lashes bought by the yard and glued on the lids), and last, the lemons and raw eggs and the thermos of strong black tea on a clean napkin beside the basin.

Madame Fremstad had an irritating custom of taking everything home, except for the hand props and incidentals provided by the theater. Other more easygoing singers, wishing to save themselves trouble, very sensibly left everything there for the wardrobe department to take care of all season long, but Fremstad was never one to save trouble for herself or anyone else. She reasoned that because her costumes had cost her so much in thought, labor, and money, she would be foolish to leave them around where they could be copied. So back and forth they all had to go—and a great nuisance it was! I broke into a cold sweat each time I pictured to myself the catastrophe which would follow the least forgetfulness on my part. Of course I kept a check-list, a careful inventory of the wardrobes

and possessions of Isolde, Kundry and the rest, but even so, the flesh is weak and I occasionally lapsed.

Madame had her own way of curing me of such carelessness. Once when I had left behind a certain necklace which Armide shared with Kundry—who had forgotten, apparently, to return it, for it was not in the proper box—I was sent home through storm and sleet to fetch it, although the singer and everyone else knew that I could not possibly return with it by curtain time. I tore through the slippery streets like a bat out of hell, and passers-by thought me quite mad, I am sure. But even such haste profited me nothing, for Madame was already on the stage and Act II well under way when I dashed in and collapsed on the bearskin rug like a Marathon runner. The wardrobe mistress had managed to find somewhere a perfectly good substitute necklace and Madame had worn it, liked it, and decided to use it in the future instead of the one I had just been disciplined not to forget.

"Tinka," said Fremstad to me shortly thereafter, "you must learn, as I have, always to be exact. There is no room in an opera house for anyone who cannot rely on herself and hence be relied on."

"But if it just happens . . . in spite of all one's best intentions?"

I ought to have known better than give her this opening. "Hell has long sidewalks made of those, *mein Kind!*" she reminded me.

## Chapter 11

BEHIND the scenes anywhere on the night a German opera is given is always Germany. Most of the singers are German-speaking, as are the characters which they play; and even among lesser folk backstage it is the speech of the evening. This de-

lighted me and I soon began to add a little theater jargon to the colorful kitchen and market vocabulary I had acquired during the summer.

I learned, that no matter what the opera, the wings were *coulisses*, the prompter, the *souffleur*, while make-up was *Schminke* or *maquillage*; and on German nights *Los!* in a tone of excitement meant rising curtain, and *Schluss!* in a tone of relief meant "the curtain falls." In my entire backstage experience the English terms were never used.

I discovered also that to belong, that is, to have a genuine function, no matter how obscure, behind the scenes was a wonderful thing. It was like joining a club. I was the newest member, however, on that first night, and as soon as I arrived with the bags and costumes I began to vibrate with the palpable tension in the air, although it was a full hour and a half before curtain time. Everyone else seemed calm enough and I wondered if I would someday loll about the corridors reading newspapers and exchanging pleasantries with the same apparent indifference. I soon discovered, however, that such nonchalance, even among the lowliest supers, was merely an antidote to the nervousness which is the occupational disease of opera and to which I early succumbed.

Fremstad rarely took any of her domestic staff to her dressing room. If they were in the theater at all they were comfortably established at a safe distance in balcony seats. One of the star dressers, the fat German Bella, cool, cheerful and deliberate, but capable of astonishing alertness and speed when necessary, came in to help me arrange things. She talked consolingly to me as she might to an innocent child who was going to the dentist's for the first time. Later Bella and I became fast friends, and she would take down her hair and tell me all about the fascinating grown-up children she dressed and undressed every night. Fremstad was one of her favorites

"When *she* sings, I always say I've earned my money that night! Makes me feel sort of good!"

Philip Crispino, head property man for many years, liked



Fremstad too. Busy as he was—and no one could be busier—he always found time for a chat with me.

"All the boys admire Madam," he would say, "she's the real stuff, and we know, for we've seen them all! She isn't fooling around, she's *working!*" He said he didn't mind indulging prima donna whims if it made them happy. "Madam can dream up a lot of trouble, more than anyone here now. But Eames was the worst. Why, she made us wrap every goddam bell in the house in cotton wadding—said they made her jumpy—and we had to send all the calls around by messenger. Now don't you go telling Madam about it . . . she hasn't thought of that one yet!"

Frau Anna Musaeus was at that time head wardrobe mistress and so devoted was she to her work (although she complained incessantly) that during the preparation of a new opera she lived right in the theater, sleeping on her ironing board and cooking on her flatiron, so it was said. She was a special guardian of the Fremstad temperament and usually hovered about when this singer was being dressed, for she had great ingenuity and patience.

That night after Bella had left, Musaeus appeared and checked everything over with a bright professional eye. She regarded me with a mixture of pity and contempt, and I don't think she ever changed this attitude, or ever really approved of me. Either she was a little jealous, or else she thought no American really belonged in any department of the music world. But she generously pinned on my breast her own insignia of office, a festoon of safety pins, and seemed to enjoy instructing me about all the pitfalls, perils and dangers with which each opera was fraught. She taught me where and how to secrete myself in the *coulisses* so I could see and hear and yet remain unseen. She also gave over to me the responsibility which had been hers, of meeting the singer promptly and accurately at all her exits, with a glass of water, a handkerchief, a tin of jujubes, a hand mirror, and a little complexion brush—the latter for flicking away, in any hasty and hidden moment,

the beads of perspiration which all grease-painted faces exude. I learned to carry all these at one time with ease, and sometimes a throat spray too, and always, at the act's end, to have that white cashmere shawl over my arm ready to wrap about a heated throat on the draughty path to the dressing room.

I had another responsibility, in which I was briefed that night by Fremstad herself immediately after her arrival. It was a duty which always amused me and I performed it faithfully and with relish whenever she sang. I had to go across the stage and up the stairs to the office of the late Frank Garlichs, then treasurer, and receive from him the check which was the evening's wage. We developed a little routine which seldom varied.

"Good evening, Mr. Garlichs. May we have the check?"

"Is she here?"

"Yes."

"Is she in good health and spirits?"

"I believe she is."

"Is she going to sing?"

"Yes."

He would then reach for his big checkbook and begin writing.

"Come back at the usual time," he would say, whereupon I ran down the stairs again and over to see what was happening in the dressing room.

From then on it was always a question of the most delicate timing. The theory was that no check would be finally delivered until Madame Fremstad, full-panoplied, stood ready to go on. On the other hand, she would not set so much as a toe upon the stage until the check was paid. Having escorted her to the wings I would then make another wild dash up to Mr. Garlich's, seize the check and fly back to the singer's side, hoping to get there before her entrance. She did not wish to have this little strategy observed by her colleagues, so she further complicated matters by insisting that I conceal the paper from prying eyes; therefore I was obliged to thrust the sharp-cornered thing beneath my blouse and contrive to pin it there even while

speeding around through the back lane and dodging the scenery. When I reached Madame's side she would tap my flat and heaving bosom with an anxious finger. If it gave forth a crackling sound all was well and the opera could proceed.

But before we reached this exciting climax there was much to be lived through. A strange metamorphosis was relentlessly developing in Room 10. Back at the apartment the singer had still been *Livan*—there was a childlike aura about her as she sat up, big-eyed, after her nap, and sipped her tea, talking, if at all, in soft lisplings and sighs. The current maid—if any—and I presently helped her into her clothes while she, off somewhere in a world of terror, stared into space and held out arms or feet docilely for our ministrations. By the time I had had my own tea and was about to depart with the valises she would be turning into the *Opera Singer*, dressed for the street, the white veil already over her hair, as she stood beside the piano trying her voice. When she arrived at the theater she had become *the famous Olive Fremstad* whose name was large upon the posters outside; who had been recognized and applauded by some passers-by; and for whom the elegant Mr. Edgar—my friend Buffalo Bill—now left his chair at the stage door, escorting her with great deference through the corridor to her room. Once her contemporary garments had been removed and whisked from sight, she began to change again, not only in appearance, which heaven knows was striking enough—for not even a mother would recognize a favorite child in a heavy operatic make-up—but in personality. By the time the wig was on and the costume brought from its hook, the woman was a complete stranger . . . not yet quite Isolde, certainly no one else.

This suspension between two worlds was the most trying period for her and for all concerned. She would stare at me and the other helpers as if we were intruders, and with gestures of extreme distaste would order us one by one from her presence as we each in turn failed to adjust a buckle or a fold of her cloak to her liking. This was quite impossible to do, as she changed her ideas at every performance and she was the only

human being who even vaguely knew what it was she really wanted. Actually I doubt even this, for after we had been exiled for a while she would grow desperate and summon us back for consultation. Somehow everyone always survived and the dangerous corner was passed.

Suddenly all was calm; she had made the transition between personalities. At last she was totally the Irish Princess; imperious, beautiful, aloof, even a little condescending and preoccupied with the practical details of the journey ahead. It was now that she swallowed a raw egg, sent for one of the *répétiteurs* and, with open score in her hands, held a brief and earnest conversation. After that she flung open her door, stepped carefully in a tray of rosin, and went out to inspect the stage and the hand props. She was gone very briefly, with Phil Crispino hovering devotedly at her elbow. When she swept back to her room the conductor of the evening would appear and they would be closeted together for a moment or two.

On this evening it was none other than Toscanini himself—young then, fiery, and impatient of any barriers that did not open at a touch. He glared at me and said something in excited Italian when I made a conventional move to announce him, as I supposed I should. Fremstad advanced, received him as if he were the Messiah, and pushed me into the hall. The dressers, knowing the routine better than I, had already scurried away down cracks in the floor or otherwise magically obliterated themselves. Immediately on his departure, which seemed to be accomplished in the vortex of a small, fussy whirlwind, there would follow from the closed room a golden flood of full-voiced scales, arpeggios, and snatches of First Act phrases. Three minutes of this—and then the Great Silence. No one breathed! What went on behind that scratched and shabby door was never known. Was it necromancy, prayer, or trance? Prayer, I think.

Presently bells began to sound through all the halls, and the assistant *régisseur*, he who was charged with the nerve-racking task of getting the chief singers to their places on the stage in time, came with his half-apologetic summons. Isolde forthwith

emerged in all her majesty, glancing neither to right nor left, and marched to her ordeal with the exalted, other-world look of a queen led to her crowning. Olive Fremstad had now cut herself off from reality with a completeness which was terrifying. I always felt that if she had chanced to encounter an inexplicable corpse or two bleeding there on her path to the stage, she would scarcely have noticed, except perhaps to lift her garments away from the gore.

Something of this kind actually happened during a performance of *Götterdämmerung* in her final season at the Metropolitan, although there was no corpse and she herself was the victim. The Norn scene used to be cut at that time and so Brünnhilde was on at curtain-rise, singing the exultant farewell to Siegfried as he began his Rhine Journey. So lost was Fremstad in the character and the emotion that after a short, dazed interval in her dressing room, she felt the impulse to follow through immediately, completely forgetting the Gibichung scene now on stage, in which she had no part. To the astonishment of those of us standing in the corridor, she flung open the door and stalked over to the heavy fire door leading to the stage. Beyond this was a small flight of stone steps descending to the dark level of the *coulisses*. Her spirit far away in time and space, she stepped off into nothingness and fell in a crumpled heap, an ankle twisted beneath her.

Four stagehands carried her back to her room and laid her on the couch. Here was a situation indeed, full of pain and panic! The long, taxing role lay almost all ahead, with no time to call a substitute. Moreover, the curtain could not be held for there was no intermission, no halt in the orchestra before her own scene with Waltraute, due in minutes.

Quickly the room filled with anxious officials: Mr. Gatti himself, obviously shaken, Mr. Guard with a brace of attendant reporters, and the house doctor, mistakenly offering an assortment of gargles and throat sprays. Fortunately Fremstad's surgeon brother Joseph was in the audience and came around promptly and bound her up so tightly that her foot became a

wooden thing, upon which she could walk. Although during both the Waltraute and Siegfried scenes she sang superbly and acted with fire and fervor, when the curtain fell she fell with it, unable, once she was herself again, to move. After more ministrations from Dr. Fremstad during a somewhat longer entr'acte, she went on again, sang through two more hours without flinching, and no one in the audience had the slightest idea that anything was wrong. Four days later she sang Elsa at the Academy in Brooklyn, leaning painfully on crutches to the very moment of her entrance. There were certain individuals who, observing this, muttered behind their hands, "Good publicity, and does she know it!" But this was unfair, for Fremstad merely believed that neither Brünnhilde nor Elsa should be subject to human limitations. On the wings of her work she too rose above them.

That first evening at the Metropolitan I had a rather bad moment just before the second act. When it was time for Isolde to emerge, all sorts of dangerous impedimenta seemed to have collected alarmingly around her dressing room door; a dozen or more musicians were there with their instruments and music racks, and there was little space between them in which to move. I felt that I ought to shoo them away at once, for there would be grave danger of Isolde, in her mothlike draperies, becoming tangled up in the melee and never reaching the stage at all—not to mention her state of mind if she eventually did. I don't know what heaven-sent instinct restrained me. Madame Fremstad issued forth, threading her way easily among them, making no comment. On the contrary, to my complete surprise, she actually smiled at the assemblage with a detached graciousness. But of course there was no mystery; these men belonged; they were her colleagues! It was King Mark's hunting party whose horns, obedient to the libretto, had made this ultimate retreat in order to "fade into the distance."

On this particular evening, November 17, 1911, Olive Frem-

stad sang one of the great performances of her career. At least, on reading over old press clippings it is apparent that all the reviewers thought so. Their columns were lyrical in her praise. There was something breath-taking about it. It was full of witch-fire and radiance and splendor. Every first-string critic was in his place of course, and I felt sorry for them all. They could barely enjoy the performance for worrying over the dearth of words adequate to describe the wonderful thing they saw and heard—as later they themselves confessed. It was the custom at that time for one or more of them to come around to the star's dressing room after the opera and offer congratulations.

Even the hardened backstage folk were moved that night. They gathered silently in groups and listened when they might be reading the evening paper; and the men in the orchestra pit, fatigued and blasé as they usually were, remained in their places for many curtain calls and tapped with their bows on their racks to show the singer respect. As for me, I smiled so proudly and so much that my face ached. When I chanced to encounter Mr. Loomis Taylor in my ramblings behind the scenery, I felt that he expressed to perfection the way we were all feeling. Taylor was a young American musician then learning the operatic ropes as assistant conductor and was an infatuated Fremstad fan.

"My God, Watkins," he whispered to me excitedly, "it's a privilege to be living in the *same century* with her!"

I think the comment which pleased the singer most was made by the critic of the *Evening Post*. "For the first time her voice sounded like a real soprano!" he had to admit. For as many years as Olive Fremstad had been singing the big dramatic roles the controversy about her voice had raged in the press. Most writers insisted that she was a natural contralto and continually warned her that it was nothing short of artistic suicide to sacrifice her vocal cords to her dramatic ambition; that she accomplished her loftier flights by will power, or by contrivance and artifice, not by art. This annoyed rather than worried her. She argued that as long as she could sing the roles, the label did not matter!

She knew her own range and recognized that, like all good Scandinavian voices, the lower scale contained notes of a thrilling, organ-like timbre. This had deceived a number of experts, including her first teacher, Frederick E. Bristol, but not Lilli Lehmann, from under whose harsh but practical régime she emerged to fulfill her first operatic engagement.

The position of leading contralto had fallen vacant at the Cologne Opera at the very moment when the youthful Olive's funds were running low. Lehmann, whose motives may have been somewhat mixed (for it is certain that she wished to keep close at hand so promising a pupil), lost no time in recommending her for the vacancy.

"Don't worry," said Frau Lilli as the young Fremstad protested tearfully that she was a soprano. "You can sing the contralto range, can't you? This is a matter of expediency, *mein Kind*. You need the money, so take what you can get and be thankful!" So Fremstad had her audition and was immediately engaged; made her operatic debut as Azucena in *Il Trovatore* with great success; and thereupon began a lifetime struggle against this accidental classification of her voice.

That first Isolde of the 1911-12 season not only bowled over the critics but had for me too a very special significance far beyond the excitement of my initiation into backstage life. This involves a small confession. The fact was that during the past weeks of unpacking, servant troubles, and other discouragements which had obstructed my best buffing efforts, I had begun to falter just a little. Whenever I had a moment to think, it grew increasingly apparent to me that the more expert I became in this métier, the further behind I must leave any life of my own. I was, after all, very young. I should, in the nature of things, have liked to be a little irresponsible and silly once in a while, to see some boys, to go dancing and to parties, and to stay up late for fun only. Obviously none of this had any place in the pattern of Olive Fremstad's professional routine.

Any great interpretive artist is first and last his or her own stock in trade; *that*, if carefully considered, explains practically



everything. Fremstad had to live for Fremstad; and she could afford to draw into her orbit only those who accepted this and were content to revolve around her. It was egoism but it was not necessarily selfishness. Whatever happened to her affected her art and she was, before anything else in the world, the fanatical guardian of that art, in season and out—particularly *in*, as I had been discovering. The questions which assailed me as I lay awake as long as I was able after a trying day, were: shall I make this sacrifice? Is it worth while?

The performance of *Tristan und Isolde* that Friday evening gave me my answer, and I was content. To be a buffer to Olive Fremstad was suddenly all that any girl could desire. This was decided not only by the sheer magnificence of the experience which had brought me so close to the working heart of a great masterpiece, but by the impact upon me of Olive Fremstad, the artist, in action. Here, suddenly, was a creature completely unknown to me although I had just spent six months at her right hand.

She often confided to sympathetic reporters: "I spring into life when the curtain rises, and when it falls I might well die. The world I exist in between performances is the strange one, alien, dark, confused!"

My father, to whom she occasionally turned for advice in spite of her alleged disappointment on first meeting him, understood this in her nature and scolded her, which she resented at the time.

"Pooh, what can you know about life!" she challenged him. Now Father had been for some time transferred to New York as chaplain of the city prisons and spent most of his days and nights in the Tombs. So he smiled and gently rebuked her.

"Madam," he said, "I know nothing about the theater, and you—everything. But about *real life*, I have probably the advantage."

"That," she parried, "is debatable—for after all the question is—what is real?"

Father, essentially a simple soul, felt that she was trapping him again. She probably was.

The woman who on that November night I had seen transfigured before my eyes had trapped me too. Olive Fremstad, it must be remembered, had at her command that quality of personal magnetism which is priceless in any theater—the power of spellbinding. When she stepped upon the stage the lights seemed to blaze up and the scenery to burst into flower and leaf. She dominated every scene, never through unworthy tricks, but through an incandescent presence. When she made her exit the illumination dimmed. One of her severest but most devoted critics, Algernon St. John Brenon, musing whimsically upon this quality in her, wrote in his column:

She was always an epic sort of creature, moving most comfortably somewhere between heaven and earth. Her personal radiation overcomes everything . . . she is a kind of dramatic potency in herself. If she were to come on the scene wearing an old dressing-gown and reading the *Ladies Home Journal*, you would still rise in your seat and exclaim "Ha, now something important is going to happen!"

Witchery of this kind is high voltage and irresistible, especially to anyone so young and impressionable as I was then. There was now small chance of escape. Such a heady draft of enchantment swallowed regularly twice a week would be quite enough, I fondly hoped, to get me serenely past any difficulties during the intervening days. My enslavement became absolute when, on the morning following the performance, I, having dashed out into the dawn to buy all the newspapers, sat reading the notices aloud to Livan and Mimi, both breakfasting from a tray in bed. As I progressed from one fulsome tribute to the next, the gratified subject of these rhapsodies lay back against her pillows and smiled radiantly at me.

"Now, Tinka," she said, when all the printed superlatives were exhausted, "you see what *you* have done!"

## Chapter 12

AFTER THIS the daily path, narrow and devoid of primroses as it was, began to assume a definite pattern. Twice weekly, beacons flashed through the shadows and confusion. These were the footlights of the Metropolitan Opera House, and their beam directed everything that we did, even to the sort of food we ate, the topics of our conversation, and whether the latter might be held in normal tones or not. There being only seven days in a week, it seemed that it was always the day of a performance, the day before, or the day after, on any of which Madame refused to speak aloud. As there is nothing more contagious than a whisper, the whole household sounded like a nest of conspirators.

The singer's generous words to me after the *Tristan* notices were, although doubtless sincere, extremely well calculated. The mere idea that I had played any part at all in the achievement of her magnificent Isolde acted like a shot in the arm. I now tossed the burden of her entire future career across my young shoulders as blithely as if it contained nothing weightier than feathers from seraphs' wings. It never occurred to me that I was totally unprepared for such an undertaking; that eagerness and zeal are not always satisfactory substitutes for experience and skill.

It occurred to Fremstad however, many times a day, and she was soon at pains to describe my limitations to me with regularity and in half a dozen languages. Considering my brashness and my blunders, she was probably a model of patience, but as the season wore on, she made less and less effort to temper her scorn. I was often surprised at her harshness, for I had seen little or nothing of its really devastating power during the summer in Europe. I was not old enough nor wise enough then to

appreciate that her severity—which, in all fairness it must be said, she practiced toward herself as well as toward others—was the product of a bleak and drudgery-filled childhood; the struggles of a girlhood hagridden by ambition and frustrated by poverty; and finally, of the ruthless discipline which her work imposed upon her restless spirit and her often refractory vocal cords. Understanding came to me slowly over the long years but my principal defect, inexperience, was cured with remarkable speed. In less than a month I imagined that there was little left to learn about the intricacies of buffing for a prima donna.

Although I trembled and quaked in the gusts of her indignation, I usually had sense enough to realize that she might to some extent be justified; so I bent my head and let the storm pass over it, where others were blown down. If I shed tears, I went to the corner drugstore and shed them in the privacy afforded by a telephone booth, which became my secret wailing wall. Yet, having observed in Olive Fremstad what high standards may accomplish, I forgave her all and decided to copy her in every way I could.

To whatever she told me to do, in those days, I gave the benefit of at least one honest trial. When she said that every good housekeeper always markets at dawn while things are fresh, I believed her and tore myself from a warm bed to go shopping in the bleak half-light of a winter morning long before seven. But Madame had overlooked the fact that this was New York, not Central Europe. I usually reached the store before the proprietor himself, and if he let me in at all, his vegetables and fruit were found to be wilted leftovers from the day before. He, as well as the cook and the maids, thought me quite crazy instead of clever.

Even more trying were the evening walks which Madame prescribed so relentlessly for herself and which consequently became my lot as well. These were taken every free night after supper on the upper paths of Riverside and often, in good weather, extended as far as Claremont and the viaduct. She had special boots made on a most un-prima-donna-like last for

these excursions, and special tweeds, hats, and veils. She also inevitably wore too many or too heavy coats, so that before the promenade was half over it fell to my lot to carry them.

We went at a dizzy pace. All who remember Olive Fremstad treasure the liveliest impression of her windblown stride, both on the stage and off. It was inimitable and challenging. Although I was a husky country girl, my legs always seemed much shorter than hers, and often I had to trot in order to keep her in sight.

Then there was that maddening business of the lamp posts. These feeble luminaries were situated at regular intervals along our path, half, perhaps a third, of a block apart, and the object of a detestable game (which she had invented, I am sure, out of sheer ostentation) was to take an enormous breath and see how many lamps one could pass without releasing it. Madame filled her copious professional bellows and whizzed by five with ease, but it took me a whole season to work up to two. I was goaded to this accomplishment by the jeers of my opponent who callously met my pleas of bursting lungs and asphyxiation by the argument that it was building up my constitution. This gay diversion was supposed to be for the purpose of inducing deep, restful slumbers immediately on our return. For my part I sometimes feared such sleep might be my last as I fell into bed with parched throat and heaving sides. But Madame, whose sense of humor was unpredictable, found my severest collapses screamingly funny, and after one of our grimmer and more ruthless sprints would be sure to bid me good night in the very best of humors.

Of sleep I had little enough at best. There were always the two regular evenings a week when, after the performance, there was a ritual from which we never deviated and which ended for me, if I was lucky, about two in the morning. First, on returning from the theater, there had to be a period of "cooling off" before we might eat; then the dinner, served by a cross and sleepy cook, which was predestined to be a failure. After that the replete and prostrate diva must be read aloud to, a rubbishy

detective story usually, so that her mind could relax. When finally, after various alarms and excursions, she was safely tucked up in bed and every screen and window adjusted to the correct millimeter, I had to wrestle with the flowers. These were always dumped into her bathtub when we came in, and now had to be unwired, dethorned, and arranged, and the tub tidied up before morning.

If insomnia plagued Madame, as it often did, she would call me an hour or two later to come and talk to her. Sometimes, being so young and often so dog-weary, I would be already deep in sleep and would not hear her first summons. I always heard her second, however, and so did everyone else, for she made enough din to arouse the entire neighborhood. In order to avert what I felt to be rather just complaints from adjacent apartments, I soon devised a more silent system of communication. I tied to my toe a string which had been passed under my door and Madame's and which terminated in a ring hooked to her bedpost. This she tweaked at need, but even when, by happy chance, she slept the night through, the harness interfered considerably with my own rest. Still, at eighteen, one not only survives such things but finds them exciting.

Fremstad could never abide unproductive idleness. It was quite all right for me to sit flaccidly at her side in a comfortable limousine and be driven through the suburbs for hours on end, because she found the excursion dull if she was alone. But let me spend so much as a single half hour curled up with a new magazine or a novel, even if all my chores were for the moment done, I would be harried and scolded. Although she herself was a great reader, she condemned this indulgence for others. Very often she would snatch a book from my hands with the exclamation, "Tinka, is that all you can find to do around here?"

She was never so happy as when her whole little universe was humming with activity. Her most radiant smiles were reserved for those moments when, returning from a rehearsal or some errand alone, she would open the front door to have her ears immediately assailed by what must have sounded like a

large and angry swarm of bees. In the kitchen the cook vigorously beating eggs; in the parlor the maid running the vacuum cleaner; through the open door of the costume room the shrill whine of the sewing machine; and in the library Tinka clattering away, inexpertly but with enthusiasm, on the typewriter. Even in the street below, busy wheels would be turning for her benefit, as Joseph the chauffeur cranked the big Peerless for its journey to the garage. All this buzz of industry centered around her and made her happy, earning for us the warmest congratulations she ever bestowed.



The second Fremstad appearance that season was at a Sunday night concert, something which I soon learned to detest but which found favor with the singer for the simple reason that she received the identical *cachet*, for one aria and perhaps a group of songs or an Ave Maria, that she was paid for four grueling hours of *Götterdämmerung*. These concerts have now been dropped from the Metropolitan schedule but for years they were enormously popular. They represented bargain day for a certain section of the public, since prices were much reduced and at least two top-flight artists were guaranteed to appear. The programs were composed largely of barrel-organ pieces, time-honored orchestral favorites, or hackneyed arias of the more florid type.

The atmosphere was informal although the singers dressed to the teeth. The women wore décolleté, long trains, shoulder-length kid gloves, aigrettes, and flashing jewels; the men were in tails and white ties, very tight gloves, and much hair pomade. They were perfectly aware that at least half the audience was there out of curiosity to see what its idols looked like *en civil*, and hence sartorial splendor was essential. Few of them suspected that, to the confirmed operagoer, they really looked a little ridiculous. When one is used to Wotan in armor and a winged helmet, it is something of a shock to meet him in starched shirt and patent leather pumps.

Madame Fremstad wore, on this particular occasion, a truly superb confection of blue, green, and silver brocade which might have been designed for a modish Rhine Maiden. She always contrived, even in her most elaborate concert gowns, to suggest the line and flow for which her operatic costumes were renowned; nevertheless, as I eyed her smartly coifed head, her gloves, and her diamond-buckled slippers, I heartily agreed with the critic who wrote, after one of her concert appearances: "It was Olive Fremstad in heavy disguise." Although she sang superbly and attacked each miniature drama in her song group with the fervor and invention which were uniquely hers, I felt it to be a great waste, like going to Niagara Falls to get a glass of water.

We had had a trying day at home; she seemed determined to compensate for the light schedule of the evening by a hard-driving severity with herself and the rest of us which tore any remnants of Sabbath peace into rags. The chief trouble as usual was dietary. When, considering that she had no heavy role to sing, should she eat dinner—at noon or after the performance? Eventually she compromised by having a large meal at both times, but it was given the importance of a state banquet and by the time it was served no one had any appetite.

Madame had one persistent and most unfortunate habit. When by chance one of her cooks produced a dish which she enjoyed, she would say, "Ah, now this is delicious, Lina," (or Tina, or Anna, or Sophie, as the case might be—always a new one of course). "You must serve this to me often. Don't forget."

And when the cook, giddy with such rare praise, ventured to serve the dish again in a week or two, Madame would stare at it with profound distaste, push back her chair and depart in a rage, protesting, "*Must* we eat the same thing every day? Does she call this food?"

Something of the kind had occurred that Sunday and she had been fidgety and restless as a result, unable to nap. Naturally everyone caught the mood from her and it was a relief when, arriving at the theater, her tension seemed to relax and she be-



gan to behave as if it were all nothing but a big jolly game. Her chief concern, after she had tapped my chest and heard her check's crisp reply, was to demand a program and verify at once that her name alone was featured and that her numbers were billed in the most favorable spots—just before the intermission and next to the finale.

As the moment drew near for her entrance there was no trace of the mystic phenomena which accompanied her operatic appearances, but her whole aura did change curiously as she stood there in the wings waiting for the conductor to come out and fetch her. It delighted me to see her arranging her facial expression to meet the public and to watch her grow an inch or two taller before my eyes. When it was over and her encore (invariably her trusty old war-horse, Delibes' "Les Filles de Cadiz") had as usual brought down the house, she indulged in an odd custom which, it seems, everyone behind the scenes had been waiting for. Returning after her final bow, she danced a step or two into the wings and impulsively threw her arms around and kissed the first man she happened to meet. In this case it was a startled but extremely gratified assistant electrician.

The next two performances were matinees, *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*, and in each case a different domestic schedule was required. Of the two, she was, oddly enough, more nervous over Elsa, a role which, in spite of its simpler dramatic requirements, lay vocally just a trifle beyond the point in her scale where she was most comfortable. The critics always swore that she could not do it and the next morning had to admit that she could. But she felt the strain and, I suspect, was rather out of sympathy anyway with the weak and insipid character of the Duchess of Brabant.

She battled tirelessly against the popular conception of the part which was so foreign to her own nature, and through an alchemy of mind and imagination actually succeeded in transmuting the weakness into a kind of strength. She created thereby an entirely new Elsa poetically symbolic and enor-

mously fascinating, especially to the women in her audience. Conscience-stricken housewives saw their own misdeeds reflected in the tragic implications of Elsa's curiosity, and doubtless made secret vows never again to look through their husbands' pockets or ask whiningly why their men had stayed so late at the office. Fremstad's Elsa received something at her hands which Wagner himself had neglected to give this most colorless of his heroines. She became imbued with a kind of fiery tenderness and dignity which ennobled and made poignant the sufferings she seemed to have brought upon herself.

Not every prima donna took this rather routine role so seriously. There is a somewhat embarrassing little anecdote about Madame Nordica. In the final scene, finding herself bored with Lohengrin's familiar narrative, she allowed her wandering thoughts to dwell anxiously upon the possible condition of her make-up which, in the quick interval of the scene shift, she had had no time to repair. To the vast astonishment of the group of chorus women clustered behind her bench, she turned to them and demanded a hand mirror. When, after a distracted flutter and argument among them, none seemed to be forthcoming, Nordica calmly got up and walked off the scene in search of one for herself. She returned, shepherded by a frantic *régisseur*, her nose neatly powdered, but the dramatic line shattered in fragments at her feet.

Emma Eames, one of the most beautiful Elsas of all time (as I had suspected long ago from the little picture in our rectory parlor) once stepped out of character even more shockingly. Eames was a great artist in her way, always a joy to look at and possessed of an angel's voice. But she is reputed to have confused temperament with temper, while, on the other hand, the glacial reserve of her state of Maine ancestry was always an obstacle in the way of her dramatic ambitions. The following *Lohengrin* anecdote illustrates this point.

One evening during the season of 1904-05 at the Metropolitan, Eames was singing Elsa to the Ortrud of Madame Senger-Bettaque. In the church scene there occurred what the soprano

evidently considered an infraction of protocol by the contralto in the order of the procession. This would seem to have been the stage director's fault, but Madame Eames took it otherwise, and, momentarily discarding the personality of the gentle Elsa, gave Ortrud's face a resounding public slap. Naturally this did not escape the avid eye of the press and much was made of the incident in the long columns then devoted to any operatic gossip. One reporter, curious about the personal reactions of the victim, asked the contralto how she felt.

"Oh," said Madame Senger-Bettaque magnanimously, "I did not resent it. I was really surprised and delighted to see *any* evidence of emotion in Madame Eames."

## Chapter 13

THE ROLE of Kundry was a bird of quite another feather. Although at first Fremstad had alternated in the part with Termina, Nordica, and on occasion with Marion Weed, she now had it all to herself. No one contested it; it was generally conceded to be the most difficult and to some extent the most thankless role of all. Actually its dramatic demands are intricate and exhausting, but as a singing part it is not to be compared in stature with Isolde or the *Götterdämmerung* Brünnhilde. Olive Fremstad, always protesting that it was a superhuman assignment, loved it dearly and she came to grips with it in the spirit of the tiger which she had invoked for me on the first day I met her.

There has never been a Kundry so thrilling as hers and there probably never will be, but the cost in wear and tear to her and her associates was staggering. It was well known in those days that *Parsifal* was supposed to labor under a curse, the Wagner family opposing with every means in its power the performance of the work anywhere but on the sacred boards of Bay-

reuth. Imprecations were breathed on all transgressors, but the Metropolitan crossed its fingers and went right ahead. It is a solemn fact, however, that there seemed to be some sort of jinx in attendance and that every performance was fraught with uncertainty and stress. The excitement behind the scenes at a *Parsifal* was duplicated in no other production.

The Festival Music Drama was usually given at matinees in those days, always on Thanksgiving, New Year's, and Good Friday, with occasional out-of-town performances in Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and Boston. For me it was a day on which for fourteen or more hours I must be prepared to shuttle back and forth from heaven to hell without pause or rest. As the performance was scheduled to begin at one o'clock, on that morning my alarm was set to ring long before daylight. To accomplish all that had to be done, and to solve all the problems which could be confidently expected to assail us in battalions before curtain time, demanded extra hours, a clear head, and a stalwart heart.

The first of these problems was both important and absurd. I had to decide whether it would be wiser to bend every nerve and effort toward keeping things smooth and calm or—more dramatic alternative—actually arrange to have a detail or two go definitely wrong, and to hell with it! If this puzzles the layman, the explanation is really quite simple. It was therapeutically essential to Madame Fremstad whenever her nerves were twanging at the breaking point, to blow off a certain amount of steam; therefore it was sometimes expedient to contrive a prepared objective for her rather than let her fury strike where it would. Undirected, she usually pounced most heavily upon good intentions with misjudgment and abuse, and this was hard to bear with grace. I tried both stratagems during the course of the years and neither really worked. Olive Fremstad was an honest woman as well as a smart one and she could not long be deceived either by herself or others. She knew perfectly well when she was behaving badly, and although she was likely to absolve

herself readily enough, sometimes she was disarmingly penitent. The whole thing was unpredictable.

What I could predict with absolute certainty, however, was that the entire domestic staff would resign in a body on the day after any *Parsifal*. In the first place they were all deprived of a holiday, and in the second, few of them had the stamina or the humor to play their parts in whatever I decided must be the order of the day. One could not really blame any cook for not understanding why she must deliberately serve the breakfast coffee lukewarm and then be scolded for it besides. But even more difficult for her was the scolding she would probably receive even if the coffee were piping hot. I tried to be as diplomatic as possible, cajoled all the domestics, and even offered bribes. But I fear that eventually I lost patience with them for it was so obvious whose need for sympathy and forbearance was greatest at that point—Fremstad, the solemn and dedicated artist, setting out for her prodigious work that day with her stomach full of butterflies and a thousand imps riding the red-hot rails of her nerves.

I tried feebly to reason with her too and perhaps calm her with the reminder that no human being then alive was capable of singing a finer Kundry, as she well knew! It was then that I discovered that she did not want to be calmed, that she felt better this way.

"Don't you try to *soothe* me, Tinka, *um Gotteswillen!*" she protested, and when, a little baffled, I just stared back at her in silence, she added, in sudden full voice, "And stop *shouting* at me!"

So that was how genius flogged itself into creating a work of art—flogged itself and everyone else within lash range! I was appalled and saddened because I realized that only another artist of her own caliber could offer her real understanding—and such are rare birds indeed!

This truth was rather touchingly confirmed many years later when Olive Fremstad was alone in a dark world of illness and

despair. I, who should have known better by this time, was attempting to cheer her by playing for her a somewhat infamous phonograph record which had been made at a Toscanini orchestral rehearsal, presumably without the Maestro's knowledge. It was considered exquisitely funny, for the great conductor gave a virtuoso exhibition of irascibility. Swearing hoarsely (with careful attention to gender) by every male and female saint in the calendar; apparently breaking baton after baton; jeering at individual players; reputedly dashing his wrist watch to the ground (perhaps in token that *tempus*—or tempers—*fugit*) he finally stomped from the stage in disgust, leaving his musicians in a ferment. As the record concluded, another caller and myself duly caused the walls of the sickroom to echo with our laughter; but when I glanced at the aging prima donna I was shocked to observe two great tears coursing down her cheeks. Was this sympathy for that harried band cringing under the Maestro's scorn? Not at all! It was for Toscanini himself that his once-glorious Isolde wept.

"Poor, poor man," she sighed and her brows lifted tragically as of old, "trying so hard to do something which nobody understands!"

She herself understood him as few others ever did, although as far as I knew their relations always remained on a purely professional basis. There was once a rehearsal, lately become legend, but which took place in my time, that illustrates the almost mystical Fremstad-Toscanini *rapprochement*. No one who was there that morning—and I am eternally grateful to have been one of them—will ever forget that strange experience.

It was a run-through of an act from *Tristan* for the benefit of a new singer. The *mise-en-scène* was bleak and without appeal to the imagination. It was just a workaday affair, with the stage empty of anything but a chair or two and a bench to indicate the setting, illuminated by a border and two unshaded strips of foots. Outside the weather was dark and blustery, a dull, mid-winter morning quite without a suggestion of overtones or sorcery. But a full orchestra was in the pit, Toscanini at the

desk, and Olive Fremstad, in her usual rehearsal dress of dark blue, was on the stage.

The music began, announcing an unusual excitement at the first note. It quieted only to rise again with electrifying sweep and power, catching up the soprano and carrying her to emotional heights even beyond herself. A strange and magical antiphony now developed without apparent cause. Enkindled by Isolde's growing exaltation, the Maestro in his turn sent the flames of his own inspiration crackling higher and higher. Tossing the torch back and forth to each other, always with an upward lift, the two artists were soon standing alone together in a high, fire-girt world quite beyond the vision of ordinary mortals. The tension continued to mount, became painful, then suddenly was no longer to be borne. Beads of perspiration broke out on the Maestro's brow, and he groaned and moaned in a hoarse, unmusical voice, the baton quivering in his hand. The men in the orchestra began to mutter, and on the stage there was sudden silence. Fremstad left her place and walked uncertainly toward the footlights, her face wet with tears and her arms flung out in protest.

"*Maestro, non posso piu!* I beg you let us go no further!"

Toscanini frowned and growled. Plainly he resented that such a mood, unprecedented and impossible to explain, should take possession of his serious and routine rehearsal and endow it with such potent enchantment that all who witnessed it were unnerved. He tapped impatiently with his baton and the singers snapped back into their places and postures. The music resumed, but it was no use. Although the spell was broken, its effect had been too prostrating. Here and there in the darkened auditorium a handful of listeners breathed again, but their pulses still pounded.

The Maestro shook his head sadly, shrugged his shoulders, and gave the signal for dismissal. He stepped down, opened his little gate, and almost ran up the steps to the stage where his Isolde sat staring at nothing while a bewildered Brangäne plied her with smelling salts and questions. I joined the group

as quickly as I could, but was brushed off without any sign of recognition. Rising from her chair, Fremstad went quietly across the stage with the Maestro toward her dressing room.

"*Dio mio*," I heard him croak, "*non è possibile, questo!*"

I did not catch Fremstad's reply, but her face which had been drawn and strained, was suddenly softened by the ghost of a little smile. Presently they turned and paced slowly back together, their heads bent close above her open score and, incredibly, both were laughing. He kissed her hand and scurried off to his room; she whistled to me, and we too made haste to leave the house.

"Always remember, Tinka," she said to me in the taxi, "what you have just seen. These things come rarely in any lifetime . . . for which I thank God!"

"Whatever was it all about? I was simply thrilled!" I bubbled, fool that I was.

She did not bother to answer me. She just muttered to herself, "What is the use?" and leaned back in her corner and closed her eyes.



One of the things which made a *Parsifal* performance so formidable was the matter of the three separate make-ups required for the triple manifestations of Kundry's character; and of these the most trying was the change between Acts I and II, when every imaginable difficulty multiplied itself into one great crescendo.

The wild woman of Act I delighted me. There was something so fantastic about the reduction of Fremstad's shining Nordic beauty to the uncouth darkness and disarray of the witch who rode the whirlwind. It was a crude job but a thorough one. Every inch of the blond skin—face, neck, shoulders, arms and hands—was stained a dirty, sulphurous brown to match the hideous toe-tights, which were like gloves for her restless feet and almost impossible to put on when she was nervous. The wig was black and tangled, standing up in wisps and points all



over her head. When her burning blue eyes, surrounded by the dark make-up, stared out from under its shadow, the effect was startling and demonic. The tattered dress with its snaky rope-ends and its mantle of mangy fur, was short, permitting the slender legs a fascinating freedom as she darted about the stage on her errands of mercy, or thrashed in shuddering fatigue upon the ground.

Olive Fremstad had a theory about all swift movement on the stage, particularly when an entrance was involved. This applied to the second and third acts of *Tristan*, to the second act of *Die Walküre* (Sieglinde and, in the last moments, Brünnhilde as well), to *Tosca*, and to several others, but of all these hurried ladies, Kundry was the fleetest. The idea was that all dramatic line must have definite flow, and that a running entrance must, to be effective, start further away than the nearest *coulisse*. Anyone who has ever turned embarrassed eyes away from the awkward canter of the average Kundry's arrival, will admit the truth of this, but few singers ever take the trouble to improve. Fremstad, after she had passed through her essential progression from nerves to silence to calm, and then to the eventual metamorphosis, would on this occasion emerge from her room a little earlier than customary and pace restlessly about, measuring distances with a careful eye. As the moment approached for her entrance and the first notes of "Kundry's Ride" sounded from the orchestra pit, she and her attendant *régisseur* withdrew to the furthest wall beside the flight of steps.

A pistol shot could not have released her more violently than the finger of the *régisseur*, who had practiced his timing with her often enough before. A path had already been cleared for her and she made her dash for the stage in an unimpeded trajectory which ended in a quivering halt, eager and breathless, right on the beat. Backstage folk always collected in an admiring group to witness this Olympic feat, and with difficulty restrained themselves from applauding when she made base.

Fortunately there was always a good deal of time between Kundry's magic slumber in Act I and her rude awakening by

Klingsor in Act II, and Fremstad needed every minute of it. While the boy Parsifal watched so dumbly the strange goings-on at Montsalvat, dressing room No. 10 on the ladies' side was a beehive of activity. The poor singer stood there in the middle of a harsh pool of light, naked and curiously defenseless, her teeth chattering and her eyes searching obliquely the pages of her score, lying open there among her paints on the dressing table; for at this point she believed that she had forgotten every note that she was to sing. For the major transformation now in progress all hands were called in and the group might have come straight from a Grecian frieze. Around the classic nude hovered three or four women pouring cups of olive oil over the stained portions of her body, rubbing the dark paint off with soft towels until the skin gleamed smooth and pink again.

Swift upon this moment, and erasing all before it, the painful step-by-step creation of the siren Kundry then took place, and time already ticked away too fast. The second act toe-tights were rose silk tricot, as was the foundation which hugged the figure and upon which was to be built piece by piece the gorgeous pagan splendor of her costume for the seduction scene. The oily rags and stained towels were whisked away while, with the white burnoose around her shoulders, she studied the mirror and began to paint the face of the temptress, quietly, intensely, with immaculate pains. Then the wig and—to my surprise—a whispered command, "Quick, Tinka, tell me how it looks from the public!"

To approximate this point of view I had to retreat beyond the piano, squint my eyes, and call desperately upon my imagination, for at close range it was a strange mask indeed. A white line down the nose; brows of dark purple; carmine in the corners of the eyes, the nostrils, and on the ear lobes; vivid rouge spread to the temples; the rest of the face and neck a milky lavender; the lashes—extended a full half inch—terminating in little blobs of black wax; the mouth a slice of tangerine. Incredible that, even given the footlights and the vast distances

of the opera house, all this could add up to a subtle and forever unrivaled beauty!

Thus we arrived at the most trying period of the whole day, the designing then and there from scratch of a costume the pattern of which was lost because it had never existed. Frau Musaeus, in charge since the beginning of the oil bath, stood rigidly by, bristling with pins, an assortment of leopard paws, breastplates, jewels, and crowns on a tray in her hands. Fat Bella was there, her arms hung with yards of rainbow-hued silks and chiffons, and ends of cloth-of-gold. A young apprentice dresser clutched spangled net and veilings, and Mr. Punzel, the wig-master, was in attendance too, making little darts at her long, flame-colored curls whenever the singer turned in his direction. For my humble part, I threaded needles and held them ready, and in between times I beat up raw eggs with sherry and uncorked the thermos bottle of broth, because Kundry said she felt a little faint.

It would be futile to relive the agonies of the next quarter hour. We were all ordered out—we were all recalled—time and again. The floor was strewn with chiffons and sequins; snippets of fur lay all about. Three separate crowns were tried, tossed aside, retrieved, and twined together. Wreckage was everywhere, but somehow, out of the confusion and storm, a figure of wonder and magnificence emerged. Across the bare shoulders, a leopard's paw; a bit of his pelt tucked under Kundry's crown, masking her head like a cap; a mantle of scarlet and gold; an underdress of vivid green with a broad jeweled girdle, whose heavy pendant ends swung between her knees; her hips bound in striped tissue of gold and silver, stiff with emeralds. Ropes of pearls hung over her breasts, bracelets jangled from wrist and elbow, and great half-moons of multi-colored stones curved over each ear like horns. Her heelless sandals were golden and she stalked up and down between the mirrors like a panther. Such were the trappings of the Fremstad Kundry, in contrast to the chic, Paris-costumed Nordica,

or the clumsy draperies of the gifted but unbeautiful Ternina. There was never anything like this before and it could never be duplicated even by Fremstad herself, for it was created anew in *Sturm und Drang* for each performance.

If, after this heroic struggle there was still time, she would have her moment of mystic silence, but no inspection of the stage was possible because the transformation scene must take place before her appearance in the garden, and even before that—perhaps the most dreaded episode of all—Kundry must descend to the subterranean maze beneath the stage, to be strapped to a little saddle ready to pop through a trap door when summoned by her evil master.

Frau Musaeus and I trotted nervously after her when she was called; I with mirror, powder, and score; Musaeus with the great white veil in her arms which Kundry was to wear when she emerged, and which could not be put on until the passage underground was safely negotiated. It was very exciting down there and very nightmarish, I thought. We were escorted to a spot which, judging by the din overhead, was directly under the center of the stage, and Madame was invited to step up on a little platform equipped with an embryonic seat and a hand-rail. She did not like it at all; she began to tremble all over as if she had been ordered to enter the Iron Maiden. But she did as she was bidden, and the mechanic in charge hovered over her as solicitously as a nursemaid over a baby in a pram.

He turned a lever and gave her a few tentative jouncings. "Just so you can get your nerve, Madam!" he explained.

"Yes," she whispered, "yes, I'm all right!" But the muscles of her arms were rigid as she clung there, and in her eyes was panic, as Frau Musaeus now stepped forward with the glittering, frosty veil which enveloped the singer, handrail and all. "I can't breathe," whispered Kundry hoarsely, and promptly denied this by inhaling one of the most prodigious breaths that ever filled human lungs.

Suddenly everyone around us stiffened and became immobilized, as in the childish game of "statues." Above our heads

a little door slid silently back, admitting a flood of sound, a worm's-eye view of Klingsor on his balcony, and a blinding white spotlight. Madame's elevator began to wobble upward and she to emit deafening and soul-rending cries. To the last her eyes, peering desperately through the veil, clung to her open score although she could not possibly read it. Mr. Morgenstern had popped up at her feet just in the nick of time and his beating finger seemed to sustain her. This was the nearest I ever came to being on the scene during an operatic performance and I was appalled at such tension and strain. I stood there transfixed, the noise and lights pouring down through the hole as I listened with racing heart to that enormous voice spilling out over my head and shoulders. Her bitter cry of "*Ich will nicht!*" echoes in my memory's ear to this day.

In a few moments the shuddering screams began to lessen, the little elevator came down and the trap closed. Musaeus sprang forward to undo the veil, making the while little clucking sounds intended to soothe and reassure. I looked at Madame and would not have known her. And this had nothing to do with the garish make-up to which I was accustomed by this time, but with the change that had taken place in the woman herself. Even down there among the batteries and engines of the twentieth century, she had contrived to become the mysterious, legendary creature of the dark, uncharted past. I shrank away from her in terror; it was the practical, unillusioned Frau Musaeus who snatched the mirror and the box of cough drops from my useless hands and offered them, with a glass of water, to the strange, other-worldish being who should really have had no need for such material comforts.

The subterranean episode was not yet done, however. In those days Kundry mounted her flowery couch down below and was elevated to the stage through a much larger trap door this time, remaining quietly sitting there behind a mechanical rosebush which presently would part obligingly and reveal her to the innocent Parsifal after he had disported himself awhile with the Flower Maidens. In later years the couch stood in the

wings and was trundled in like a gocart, all because of a contretemps which occurred at one of the performances during that very season.

The Bayreuth Curse, of course!

Not only did Kundry's couch have to rise up, but Klingsor's whole battlement had to go down. That required another huge trap door on the left of the stage, which normally should be safely closed by the time the Maidens ran on. One day its jaws stuck, leaving a chasm around which the choristers had to pick their way in semi-darkness. It was like playing blindman's-buff on the outermost rim of the Grand Canyon. To make matters worse, the crew charged with Kundry's upward flight did not realize that the other trap had refused to close and so duly opened theirs.

Now the Maidens were indeed in a fix, black holes yawning on both sides and nowhere else to go. The head electrician, thinking only of the public, ordered the lights dimmed more completely, and the panic on stage increased until little yelps of terror and frantic whispers of "Look out!" were plainly audible in the midst of the siren song. Fremstad-Kundry sat there frozen on her couch below, breathing a mixture of prayers and maledictions, but she resisted the strong temptation to get up and walk away although she said that she expected a maiden to drop upon her at any moment. By some miracle no one was hurt, but the act got off to a distracted start from which it never recovered. The rose-covered gocart was substituted after that, but it was always an absurdity. The Prinzregenten Theater in Munich solved the problem of Kundry's entrance in this scene by a much simpler and truly inspired device. The stage, full of purple and orange mists, only half revealed the Flower Maidens as they darted in and out of the shadows, and presently Kundry's call seemed to come eerily from everywhere and nowhere as a greenish spotlight fell upon a dead-white face with great blazing eyes. She issued from the mists clad in veils of the same colors and remained mysterious and unreal throughout the act.

But never so at the Metropolitan. There everything was tangible; nothing was left to the imagination; the magic garden and Kundry's pavilion might have come from a Christmas pantomime. Olive Fremstad, however, transcended this as easily as if it had not been. When she reclined there on that ridiculous couch and arched her purple brows at Parsifal she was "the Rose of Hell" incarnate; when she lifted a flaming curl and kissed him behind its fragrant web, sex reared its lurid head more potently than that sedate and stuffy stage had often permitted. I wondered, at that moment, if she ever really thought about the revival meetings of her childhood, as she claimed she always did in *Parsifal*.

I was standing in the wings regarding her with a look of awe and wonder, when I became conscious of a presence close behind me, a large gray bulk from which a hand presently reached out and patted my shoulder. I looked up startled and saw that it was none other than Mr. Gatti-Casazza himself. He indicated the figure on the couch with a sidelong nod. "*Una bella donna*," he said, "*molta bella! Ma molta pericolosa, non è vero, carina?*"

Mr. Gatti knew that I could not reply in Italian, but he liked to tease. Before I could retaliate appropriately, he laid a fat finger to his lips and moved silently away.

Mr. Gatti was always nice to me. I think he respected me because I remained on the job longer than any of my predecessors. I assured him that it was entirely a matter of personal devotion on my part, but he insisted that it was mere obstinacy. He pretended to share with me his secret that *la bella Fremstad* was the most unruly of all the pets both great and small in his vast menagerie. Once while chatting with me, he pulled out his watch chain and detached from a bunch of charms dangling there a tiny black enameled kitten playing with a pearl, which he presented to me. He would not tell me why he gave me this delightful little object, but he whispered that on no account must the *bella donna* be told about it. I was enchanted, of course,

and kept it carefully in its red morocco case as my secret talisman.

After the second act of *Parsifal*, applause is permitted and Fremstad bowed humbly, but with happy eyes, before the thunderous ovation. The most exacting scene in all her repertoire had gone off this time without a flaw, Cosima's Curse to the contrary notwithstanding. Just once had I seen her lift a wary eye toward the top of the proscenium where, during the previous season, a dreadful mishap had occurred. Two stagehands, equipped with buckets of calico leaves to shower down on the withering garden when Parsifal would grasp the sacred spear, were sitting up there on a suspension bridge patiently waiting for their cue, when suddenly a pulley balked, a rope let go, and they found themselves hanging there in full view of the audience—with no escape possible! Overcome with embarrassment, the two men, wearing the shirtsleeves and straw hats which then comprised the correct uniform for behind the scenes, rushed frantically back and forth on their aerial perch, tilting and sliding; but nothing happened except delighted guffaws and squeals of alarm from the auditorium. Eventually they were snatched unharmed out of sight, but the whole seduction scene was ruined. Olive Fremstad, the Kundry, and Karl Jörn, the Parsifal, not knowing at first what was convulsing the public, had valiantly gone on singing, but when they chanced to cast a glance upward, they too were lost. Jörn was laughing when the curtain fell, but Fremstad alternately scolded and wept. So ever afterward, these singers' eyes were irresistibly drawn from time to time toward the aerial danger spot.

The preparation for Act III was quiet. There was a religious solemnity in the dressing room, although there were also visitors: "Charlie"—whose last name, Dyer, had now become familiar—James Huneker, the critic, and others. Mary Garden was in the house but she sent around a note scribbled on her program to say that she was too "*émotionnée*" to trust herself to speak.

The third Kundry, the Magdalen, was in some respects the



most lovely of all the Fremstad creations. It was achieved, it seemed to me, quite simply and out of great weariness. The garish make-up of the temptress was all wiped away and in its place was a *matte*, intense pallor which suggested unworldliness rather than illness. The eye sockets were darkened just a little, the lashes left as they were, the lips a trifle paler but still red. The third wig was supposed to be the first one combed and smoothed into a flat black cloak of hair. It was not the same, of course. Laymen never seem to understand about wigs and constantly marvel at the wonderful locks which prima donna heads appear to grow. The truth is that almost never, and certainly not in that day, did even a lady of the chorus display her own hair on the scene.

The third Kundry's dress was only a coarse brown shift girdled with a rope. Her personality, naturally, changed with her looks. For a full half hour before the curtain she was gentle and sad and somewhat die-away. None of us feared her now, but we prowled about the dressing room on tiptoe, as if we were in church. Although Kundry still had a good deal to live through, and had to die as well, she had nothing more to sing, and only the two words, "*Dienen, dienen!*" to utter. The third act was now upon us like a gentle benediction.

I was standing in a front *coulisse*, very near indeed when the repentant Kundry washed the feet of the holy knight. I watched this little operation with some interest and was reminded of a story which I had read in the diva's scrapbook. Several seasons before this one, the company had journeyed to Los Angeles to bring the first *Parsifal* to the West, and great had been the excitement, with special stage equipment installed in an armory, and all seats booked for months ahead.

On the train, two days out, Karl Jörn, the German tenor who loved the American game of poker, was rushing from his car to another in order to join some other addicts, including Scotti and Whitehill.\* In his eagerness he missed his step in one of

\* Clarence Whitehill was a member of the Metropolitan company for one season, 1909-1910. He rejoined the company in 1914.

the vestibules and fell, with his foot between the two platforms, severely wrenching his ankle. When this disaster was reported to Madame Fremstad, she issued forth from her drawing room at once, armed—like Isolde—with her maternal heritage of healing. Her hands, strong and skilled in the art of medical massage, were soon at work on the injured ankle, and in spite of the tenor's groans and yelps of anguish, she attended him faithfully with compresses and manipulations at frequent intervals during the remainder of the trip. This act of mercy made good publicity, so the reporters waiting at the station gateway seized upon it with enthusiasm.

"Mr. Jörn is a very bad patient," Fremstad told them. "He makes a lot of fuss, but I shall keep right on with the treatments. He has a role to sing with me and I mean to see that he does it. I may even do a bit for him right on the stage—the third act, you know. And then for once he will not be able to say "*Ouch!*"

The scene before my eyes was so touching that I was sorry that I had let my mind wander. Kundry's dry sobs at her baptism, turning at last to the tears that had for centuries been denied her, were real, and I found them so affecting that my own eyes were momentarily blinded and, at the beginning of the transformation scene, I rushed full tilt into the scenery that was busily winding itself around an enormous spindle. Two stagehands pulled me back just in time or I might have been crushed to a pancake on the Good Friday landscape—one more victim of the *Parsifal* jinx.

This shock and my general exhaustion (it had been quite a day!) ill-prepared me for the mystic rites and the sublimity of the finale, which I had never seen before. When the curtain fell and I ran over to help Kundry rise from the steps where she had just expired, I was still sniffing. Fremstad's mascara had run in little black channels over her chalky death mask, but she still looked beautiful. Once the curtain had fallen, however, it was all over for her and it did not take her long to shake off the whole mood.

"Come on, kid, let us get away from here quick!" was her one

idea, and forewarned of this, Bella and I had already packed almost everything. She was out of her make-up and into her lace veil in no time; and with just a brief pause at the stage door to toss a handful of chrysanthemums to the loyal fans who waited there for her no matter what the weather, we climbed into the automobile and were off.

Joseph the chauffeur was just a little sullen because he must work on a holiday, but Madame wasted small sympathy on him. Her nose was twitching as if she could smell the roast turkey which he announced was waiting for him at home.

"Everybody has a turkey but us, Tinka!" she whispered dolefully, "but I suppose I may count on bread and milk at least!"

"A little better than that, I hope!" I answered; but I scarcely dared believe that my predawn planning could have borne any practical fruit during my absence. I was still obsessed with my day's experience in the theater; I could not shake off the impression made upon me by the final scenes sufficiently to worry for the moment about roast turkey.

"Livan, I have decided," I ventured in a small, weak voice, "to adopt '*Dienen, dienen!*' as my own motto in life!"

I had imagined this would please her, but she pounced at once. "I'm sorry, child, but that belongs to me, you know . . . to me and to the Prince of Wales, of course."

"But I thought that you had adopted '*Kunst heisst Können!*' You said that that was yours!"

"Mine and Lilli Lehmann's, yes!"

"Then whatever is yours exclusively?" I persisted.

"But why all this talk? Now listen to me once for all. I have already told you this and you will learn it for yourself someday. It is not exactly a motto, Tinka, just a truth, a very sad truth! A great man said it—'*Dort wo du nicht bist, dort ist das Glück!*'"

"But how awful!" I exclaimed. "Fancy believing that happiness is only where you are *not!* Do let's leave that one alone!"

She glared at me through the white veil. "Must you go on arguing? You seem to forget that I have been singing today!"

This purple mood melted like frost in the sun when we

opened the apartment door and Mimi sprang to meet us with a bow of orange ribbon on her collar. My mother, who often spent Thanksgiving with her own family near New York, had been in during our absence and had worked miracles. The table in the dining room was spread for a feast. An epergne stood in the center full of grapes and polished red apples, surrounded by dishes of bonbons, raisins, and cranberry sauce; while at each place was a little paper pumpkin full of salted nuts. There were mince and pumpkin pies in the pantry, and the turkey in the oven was bursting with chestnut stuffing.

Madame's mouth began to water as she sniffed the delicious odors, and tossing off her wraps to fall as they would, she went directly to her baronial chair and tinkled a silver bell.

"Food!" she cried triumphantly. Then leaving her place again, she trailed around to where I sat and solemnly kissed the top of my head.

"I've never had anything like this before, Tinka," she said. "Just for once happiness is *right here!* I have a HOME!"

## Chapter 14

FIVE DAYS later peace again had fled. The *Parsifal* curse was not through with us. On the day before Madame Fremstad was to sing her annual Kundry in Philadelphia she came down with a cold. She rushed madly to Dr. Holbrook Curtis, who presided over the precious throats of all the big stars in those days, and bade him stop at nothing. Sprayed and swabbed, dizzy and depressed, she returned to her bed. There was not a ghost of hope by nightfall when even her whisper had become a croak, and her cheeks were flushed with fever.

To miss a performance meant not only loss of prestige but loss of cash. She, like all the top-ranking artists then, was engaged by the performance, and she had a seasonal forty-two in

her current contract. It was therefore always a gamble for her and for the company as to how this would come out. If she canceled, she lost; if the management dropped a performance, she won. This season which had started so well for her was actually one of her most expensive; she missed six. But on the other hand the company failed to book her for three, so her net loss was only three *cachets*. The loss in morale was far heavier. It does no public artist any good to disappoint an audience, and it became a matter of great pride to me that the Metropolitan owed her money every season after that. She never canceled another performance except that ultimate Sunday night concert for which she had been billed in an unworthy gesture designed, it was certain, to humiliate her after her effulgent farewell in *Lohengrin*—as we shall see in another chapter.

It is more dramatic to blame the dynasty at Bayreuth for the affliction which laid low the Metropolitan's best Kundry, but actually the new apartment had more to do with it. As I had observed when we moved in, the plaster seemed scarcely dry; and as the winter storms beat upon the thin and too-quickly-erected bricks, the rain seemed to come right through. The paper on our walls blistered and yellowed and finally began to roll off in strips. The heating plant was perverse. When the thermometer went down outside, no heat rose in the apartment radiators; when we had a warmish, sunny day the steam came up literally like thunder and we could not turn it off. It was a lethal trap for any opera singer.

After Madame somehow staggered through another *Isolde* and the season's first *Armide*, she missed a *Tosca*, always a favorite of hers, and four other performances, including the New Year's *Parsifal*. So she suddenly decided to break the lease and move to drier quarters before disaster engulfed her altogether.

The decision to move in the middle of a season was a serious matter, and, curiously enough, for a woman of such forcefulness and courage, Olive Fremstad always suffered tortures of doubt immediately after making up her mind. She once ex-

plained this apparent anomaly by admitting that she had been wrong so many times in her life, with such tragic results, that she no longer trusted herself. This attitude, of course, only applied to her private affairs; no uncertainties ever assailed her on the stage. It was very convenient for her, at such moments, to have a buffer around as a rack on which to hang mistakes once made or, on the other hand, to force into making the initial decision and thus protect herself ahead of time if things went wrong. At that time it never occurred to me that my own judgment was not infallible—a delusion common to teen-agers even today—and so I was pleased and flattered to have her lean upon me and equally nonplused when results were not always just what I had planned. Thus it did not seem strange to me when one morning Madame summoned me to her bedside and croaked at me in half-voice:

"Tinka, I don't want to go back to hotels; they stifle me! Suppose you go out today and find another apartment!"

With no more sense of inadequacy than if she had asked me to get her a new pair of gloves I set bravely forth. She had given me no directions, but bearing in mind her preference for Riverside as a place to walk and the West Side subway as an emergency line of communication with the opera house, I did not take the more fashionable East Side into my calculations. I knew nothing about agencies; I thought that one just walked through the streets until a "To Let" sign caught the eye. To my surprise I discovered on my initial tour that most of the available apartments were unfurnished, and that the rare few which were fully equipped resembled either dentists' waiting rooms or the snuggeries of popular chorus girls (as I imagined them).

Convinced that neither of these would be an appropriate setting for my prima donna, I solved the problem by announcing to her that we would simply furnish one for ourselves! Of how elaborate, how expensive, and how protracted an undertaking this would be, I had not the faintest conception. Madame, however, had a few doubts.

"I can't spare the time or the strength, Tinka, you ought to

realize that! You would have to do it alone, and what, *um Gotteswillen*, do you know about furnishing a house?"

"Oh," I argued brightly, "it shouldn't be difficult—just certain basic things for each room. You have everything else . . . the 'homelike trunk,' the portraits and books! There is a lot of stuff at home too, that Mother can send me for my room."

"That isn't the point really," Madame went on. "The point is, should I clutter myself up with a lot of *things*? Isn't my life complicated enough already? After all, I am just a wandering minstrel—what should I do with a whole house full of junk? No, Tinka, such joys are not for me! I'll telephone the Ansonia tomorrow."

"Nonsense," I cried in the authoritative tones she had taught me, "I never knew anyone who needs a home more than you do! Why, it would make all the difference. . . . You would probably never have another cold, with no one's germs around but your own. And the whole place would be *you*, Olive Fremstad—nobody else!"

This was specious and silly, but I was learning fast: I knew where the chinks in her armor were.

She looked at me solemnly. "Tinka, you frighten me," she said. "I can feel myself weakening. Who is going to pay for it all? Had you thought of that?"

"Oh yes," I continued undaunted, "but unfurnished places are much cheaper, and you'd never have to store anything. Besides you have two seasons more at the Met on this contract and it would be awfully sensible to keep the same address and the same telephone number, wouldn't it?"

"I tell you I can't afford it!"

I had the answer ready for that one, an argument which rarely failed. "I think that you should spend some money on yourself for once. You have certainly earned it!"

"And how!" she nodded, pleased. "You can have no idea, of course! But I guess you win, Tinka, you crazy kid! Go on now, get busy!"

I selected two or three possibilities for her to choose from, but

the following days were blustery, cold, and wet; it would have been rash indeed for any singer, still in precarious convalescence, to venture out. So, alone and unaided, I decided on an eight-room apartment a block from the Drive. It has the essential rooms; it was high, sunny, freshly painted, but not new. However, its entrance, paneled in gray marble, seemed to me sufficiently impressive for so distinguished a tenant. I brought Madame the floor plan and sketched the furniture into each room. She was thrilled and signed the leases as soon as they came. She wanted to move in at once.

By the time this matter was settled, she was on the mend, or so we thought, and rehearsals and other professional demands upon her time began to intrude on our new plans.

"You'll simply have to get the furniture by yourself, just as I feared, Tinka. But hurry up about it; I can't afford to be ill again."

So I bought myself a little notebook and listed what I thought should go into each room.

I decided to get everything at John Wanamaker's, chiefly because it was the store with which I was most familiar. My family had done its shopping there as long as I could remember, for in those days clergymen were offered a generous discount. I had opened my first account there when my salary began, and was pleased to discover that I too, as Father's daughter, was entitled to the same consideration. So everything that I bought for the diva's apartment I charged to myself, thinking naively that Madame might as well profit by the discount too. But nearly a week went by and nothing was delivered. I was frantic, and finally called up the manager and complained.

"My dear young lady," a patient voice explained, "before you became a charge customer we looked up your credit, of course. We know that you are employed as a secretary, and were glad to extend to you the privilege of running a moderate monthly bill. But in a single day you have charged over two thousand dollars worth of goods, so naturally we have delayed shipment pending inquiry. We hope that you will understand."



"Understand nothing!" cried Madame, who had been listening on the extension. "I consider that we should cancel the whole order at once and take our business elsewhere. I have never been so insulted! Miss Watkins is my secretary (not buffer?) and made these purchases for me!" His tones were deep-chested and formidable.

"And who, may I ask, are you?"

"I am Madame Olive Fremstad of the Metropolitan Opera Company!"

This announcement was made with such an explosion of tonal amplitude, such dramatic force and authority that even Mr. Wanamaker himself might have been somewhat shaken. There was a choking sound in my ear, for the poor man on the other end of the wire was suddenly beyond his depth. He withdrew with a terrified mumble. "Just a minute, please, Madam, just a minute!"

The next voice that we heard was suave and edged with a tone of obsequiousness.

Certainly, but certainly, one saw it all now quite clearly. In order to avoid publicity, the secretary had been instructed to keep the name of her illustrious employer out of the matter. Very clever, sensible idea . . . although, in effect, the discretion of John Wanamaker could have been fully relied upon. . . . In any case, apologies were definitely in order, and he trusted no offense was taken. . . . The entire shipment would be delivered within twenty-four hours. . . .

"And *prix d'artiste*!" Madame reminded him.

"Beg pardon? Oh, of course, professional discount, yes, gladly. An honor, Madam! And please have the young lady call us if everything is not perfectly satisfactory."

"You see, Tinka," said Madame, as I joined her in her room, "for once you have been too smart. It is lucky that you had me behind you or you would have landed in jail!"

I could not quite follow this argument, but I was much relieved that the furniture was actually on the way and I humbly thanked God that there were as yet no performances to worry

about, so that I could at least have one whole free day in which to get settled. In my ignorance and optimism, I supposed that would be sufficient. I got up at five and went to bed the following morning about two, but even so the move took nearly a week!

On the first of the month we left the old apartment and Madame, Mimi, and Betty, the maid, were exiled under protest to the Astor, while the rest of the staff camped out in the new quarters. Betty lent a hand from time to time, but Madame was not allowed to stick so much as a toe over the doorsill until all was in readiness. She nearly burst with curiosity and plagued me night and day by telephone, scolding and pleading. The chef at the Astor had invented in her honor a special dessert which he called *Coupe Fremstad*; a fancy concoction of fruit, wine, and spun sugar in a basket of orange skin; but this did nothing to assuage her longing for home cooking, and only depressed her.

On the night that she and Mimi finally arrived the excitement was intense. We had all been "working like tigers" this time, including Joseph, who had shuttled back and forth from the hotel with the luggage and done innumerable errands. The installation in every department was complete; fresh paper lined every drawer and shelf, every last garment was on its perfumed hanger, food was in the oven, flowers in all the vases.

Why Madame Fremstad did not drop dead on the spot when she caught her first glimpse of home, I will never know, for to her who knew the intimate décor of far-flung palaces and chalets, but not of Vermont rectories, the shock must have been staggering.

I had furnished and decorated the entire place in as perfect imitation of my parents' home as was possible in the new environment. It was really all I knew how to do, and with infinite and loving pains I had certainly accomplished it. Brass beds, mission tables, rocking chairs, Wilton carpets, lace curtains, a Grand Rapids mahogany dining "suite," lamp shades with bead fringe. I was satisfied, even a little complacent, except for

one or two special items. I had refrained from afflicting the handsome Steinway grand piano (which the company supplied every season to artists) with the adjunct of a pianola, although I was sorely tempted. But there was, to my mind, an even more glaring omission. Nowhere in the entire city had I been able to find the one object which I had always supposed to be a must in every well-regulated household—a bastard monstrosity which combined the worst features of hatrack, mirror, umbrella stand and hall bench—the latter really only a lid on a box designed to hold (so useful for a prima donna!) old rubbers, skates, and tennis balls. That such a practical object should prove to be unobtainable in the great metropolis when every house on our street in Vermont had one in its front hall, was very frustrating to me then. I wondered what one ever did without it, but Madame, I was glad to see, did not seem to miss it. She swept in with the happy stride of anticipation which reminded me of her *Tosca* entrance, and stood there breathless amid the glories of the new parlor.

"Tinka-Leben!" she exclaimed, her eyes very bright, "I simply cannot take it all in!"

I chose to interpret this as joy, and I accompanied her in a royal progress from room to room, pointing out with, I thought, pardonable pride, the various splendors and conveniences. When at last she reached the end, culminating in a hungry sniff in the kitchen, she stalked into the music room, leaned against the piano, and burst out laughing. I was a little offended.

"Come here, child," she said, and enfolded me in one of her rare embraces. "I think it is all very splendid. You have worked hard, but you have made one mistake. It is not, as you once said it should be, *all Olive Fremstad*. No indeed, it is, I fear—mostly Mary Watkins!"

I was crestfallen, for in one illuminating instant I knew that she was right.

My lower lip trembled and I looked at her in sullen misery. "You will just have to pretend that you got it furnished . . .

you did in a way. Then people will not think it quite so queer. Oh, I'm so sorry!"

Madame patted my shoulder. "*Nimm' dich zusammen, Kind!*" she said. "I like it, I tell you! This is, after all, my *American* home, and it is perfect, it is *echt!* I could never have done it myself, never in a hundred years! Of course I shall put a few touches here and there, just little things you know nothing about—and presently it will be *our* home, you shall see!"

Actually, she did very little to the apartment in the course of our three years there. I think she took a sort of quizzical pride in it, as if it were a museum piece. A few Norwegian copper pots appeared, ranged on sideboard and plate rail; eventually the walls throughout the place were painted white; and a sofa and desk took their places in the dining room, giving it an informal and continental atmosphere which, at the time, I did not appreciate. The Carmen portrait and the shawl, the Sad Shepherd and the leopard, Lilli Lehmann and the rest, all eventually took over for her, but I knew in my heart that the place remained a horror.

I was grateful when, toward the end of our last season there, a prominent importer of antiques who was also a kind of super-decorator, became one of Madame's most ardent admirers. He was shocked to the depths of his sensitive soul by the background against which his goddess conducted her private life. In no time at all he had persuaded her to move to a more suitable dwelling on Park Avenue and, stick by stick, to dispose of Mr. Wanamaker's bourgeois appointments. Under the guidance of her new friend Madame Fremstad acquired a setting that was—to use the term then so fashionable—*definitely interesting*, and had a plethora of tapestries, credenzas, mirrors, and antique candelabra among which she fell almost automatically into grand-operatic poses. In spite of the familiar contents of the "homelike trunk," which no new friend or lover was then powerful enough to make her abandon, the elegant new abode lacked the *Gemütlichkeit* which had prevailed on West End Avenue, and she was never really contented there.

## Chapter 15

OLIVE FREMSTAD came back into circulation with an Elisabeth at the Brooklyn Academy of Music early in January, a little less than a month after she had succumbed to the damp and chill of our first abortive homemaking. She was always pleased to have any opportunity at all to sing this role although it was difficult to understand why, for it was one which exercised so few of her special talents. Personally, I think that she undertook it as a means of shuffling off the part of Venus to other shoulders, for she once told an interviewer that every ambitious singer gets that roseate goddess out of her repertoire at the earliest possible moment. This may have been a matter of professional strategy, for the role is frankly written for a mezzo and moreover tradition gives Elisabeth priority in every *Tannhäuser* cast, with the star dressing room included. Oddly enough, however, when the art of Olive Fremstad is recalled today, someone will be sure to exclaim, "Ah, her superb, unforgettable Venus!" It remains stubbornly among the most vivid recollections of this singer, and it is a remarkable fact that during the eleven seasons when the part was almost exclusively assigned to her, it became a major rôle. Since that time it has relapsed to secondary rating.

Mr. Gatti met Fremstad's protestations on this subject with the same old argument that the Metropolitan subscribers would reject any other Venus. It was a plausible and delicately flattering excuse for withholding her Elisabeth from the home stage, but Madame suspected that his motives were mixed. It was Mr. Gatti's intricate and onerous job to maintain some measure of harmony among his tempestuous prima donnas, and it is probable that he believed that the end justified the means. At any rate, whether it was diplomacy, guile, or mere circumstance, Fremstad, after a few rather mild explosions, managed to rise

right above the whole thing and go about her business. She never did subscribe to the theory that such business included the obligation to cultivate socially the board of directors of the opera or their wives, as did some of her colleagues whose exploits in this field had even provoked criticism in the press. She was resigned, even gratified, to be called "an unsociable crank" in the same columns, and forbade me to take up any verbal cudgels on her behalf. But she paid heavily for her lofty detachment as time went on, and the suppression of her Metropolitan Elisabeth was doubtless one of these penalties. Although Brooklyn heard it twice, and she sang it in Philadelphia and in Montreal (where I first heard it), New York was vouchsafed only a single performance, and that under preposterous circumstances.

This unique event took place during her last season at the opera and was tinged by the most unsuitably comic overtones. Looking backward at this and subsequent imbroglios that year, it appears to have been the opening gun in a baffling campaign which terminated in Fremstad's departure from the Metropolitan Opera Company. She had been scheduled, in a mid-December *Tannhäuser*, to sing the Venus as usual, but she had been hoarse and somewhat under par since her Tosca of the previous week and had decided to run down to Atlantic City for a few days, telling no one. This was in direct defiance of a regulation then current in every singer's contract, which forbade any member of the company to leave the city without notifying the management. The rule was winked at more or less, and small suburban excursions were quite customary, but this flight was further afield. For some reason I was left at home. After Madame had been away for several days, I was called late one evening to the telephone by Mr. F. C. Coppicus, then secretary (and ~~buffer~~, I may add) to Gatti-Casazza.

"Where is Madame Fremstad?" he asked me in peremptory tones.

"I cannot say."

"You know, don't you?"

Loyalty, or the truth? . . . I decided to temporize. "Certainly I know, but she is strictly incommunicado." I thought this sounded very fine indeed until he corrected the gender.

"*Incommunicada*, eh? Are you aware, my dear young lady, that this is a breach of her contract, a serious breach?"

Now I was on my mettle. After all, it was just a skirmish of buffer against buffer. "That is really not my business, Mr. Coppicus. My business is to do exactly as Madame Fremstad has instructed me. She forbade me to tell anyone where she has gone."

Mr. Coppicus assumed a more friendly tone. "Look, Miss Watkins, you are a girl with sense. Fremstad has long been eager to sing the Elisabeth here, has she not?"

"Oh yes, but . . ." I felt the trap closing.

"Well, she is to sing it Friday night!"

"What!" I screamed, "But you can't do that to her! Olive Fremstad's first Elisabeth at the Metropolitan! . . . There have to be announcements—*réclame*! There isn't enough time!"

"As to that," said Coppicus, "we will naturally do what we can. But I see that I shall have to take you into our confidence. Our usual Elisabeth happens to be indisposed—out for at least a week. Just to show you how desperate the situation is, we are having to cast Madame Matzenauer as Venus! I tell you this, a naïve young girl, but you surely know what I mean!"

I could hear him chuckling apologetically, and I joined him in a burst of honest mirth. I was not quite that naïve—I knew where babies came from! Everyone at the opera house had felt for weeks the gravest concern whenever Madame Matzenauer risked another appearance, for it was all too obvious that she was soon to become a mother. As a matter of fact, the safe arrival of her daughter Adrienne a week or so after this episode was greeted with a general sigh of relief. But Venus in the last stages of pregnancy was indeed a merry thought! So I finally decided to obey the law if not exactly the letter. "I will telephone Madame tonight," I said.

Like a good soldier, Olive Fremstad came home, and she sang

the role, and she lost nothing by so doing, for the papers commented not only on her sportsmanship but on the management's lack of courtesy in thrusting its leading Wagnerian into such a situation. Possibly her notices were even a little better than they otherwise might have been, for the critics never really accepted her as the saint of the Wartburg. I once asked one of them why this was, for it seemed to me that her performance had extraordinary radiance. But I only met with the same old threadbare argument: "I guess we just miss her as Venus!"

All this was to happen, of course, two seasons later than that night when she journeyed to Brooklyn to sing for the first time after her month of illness. She was in such jubilant spirits at the thought of going back to work again that even a heavy snow-storm was no deterrent. Joseph was loath to take the car out for fear of being stalled in a drift en route, so we had no alternative but the subway. I expected this to upset her, but not at all!

I must say that we created quite a sensation among the late commuters, what with the retinue and the luggage. Joseph entered first in his smart breeches and puttees, carrying the two largest valises; then came Betty the maid, burdened with wig box, crown box, make-up case, and several extra wraps; then myself with Mimi; and lastly Madame, swathed in mink and sealskin, wearing high red Russian boots, and at least three white lace veils over her hair and face. She sank into a corner and we all closed in around her to ward off draughts and curious glances as best we could. But she was anxious and excited and kept trying her voice every now and then above the roar of the train, which was certainly not the best way of escaping attention. The old temptation to giggle presently assailed me, but this was so obviously a devotional pilgrimage for her that I swallowed my mirth in shame.

That night I saw close at hand the beautiful costume which had so stirred my imagination in Montreal the previous spring. As I ran my fingers lightly over the soft ivory velvet



and adjusted the golden girdle and heavy, spiked crown, my thoughts reverted to that earlier occasion and I found it difficult to believe that I was not an entirely different being from that moon-struck juvenile who was meeting her first celebrity. Now this new and fascinating world was already my own, as unalterably as if death and rebirth had translated me. My heart beat high and proud. I glanced at Madame, studying herself so earnestly before the glaring mirror, and felt the sudden need of confiding these thoughts to her, but she had already left me far behind and was mysteriously changing her personality there before my eyes. In the past month, preoccupied with material affairs, I had half forgotten this metaphysical process which accompanied Olive Fremstad's preparation for entering into one of her roles. Abashed and a little frightened, I crept away, closing the door—and none too soon—on her mysteries.

As the evening progressed with every outward display of success, I began, nevertheless, to experience certain intimations of tension and anxiety and soon realized with dismay that the singer was building her tones artificially and that her eyes held hints of fatigue and fright. She had come back too soon—her voice was not fully restored. Had the role been more exacting, an Isolde for instance, I knew that she would scarcely have got through it. As it was, a chorus woman was substituted on Elisabeth's bier and we left the theater the moment the pilgrim scene was over.

Three nights later found us in Philadelphia with another role that was not among her most congenial, the *Siegfried Brünnhilde*. Fremstad once described its disadvantages thus:

"You spend the day worrying as usual, but can you go down to the theater and get it off your chest by eight o'clock? No—whether you do it at home or in your dressing room your worrying goes right on until ten or later! By the time you are dressed and made up—which, out of sheer restlessness, you usually accomplish too soon—you are in a fine state of nerves. You cannot test your voice properly; you have no preparation, no warming up. I have tried standing in the wings and watch-

ing the other scenes of the opera in order to get in the vein, but that is dangerous because of draughts. Well, so finally, while the orchestra plays relentlessly on—increasing the tension, of course, because the time limit is absolute—you lie down on that rock with every muscle taut, and you feel as helpless as a sacrificial lamb on an altar. How I hate those endless couches and rocks I have to sing from . . . Venus, Kundry, Armide, and this, the worst of all! The orchestra reaches me muffled by my helmet wings\* and the big shield compresses my diaphragm. I always dread that silly moment when Siegfried unfastens my armor and then, because my chest isn't as flat as his, leaps back as if a bee had stung him. . . . I have a crazy desire to laugh! And then, as the lights flood into my eyes I have to sing, my throat by this time cold and stiff from waiting. The great salute to the sun and to my long-awaited lover is enormously difficult, especially as I always try to avoid the impression of yawning and stretching which many Brünnhildes give at this point. One can't blame them, what else is there to do? One can't just sit there and blink. So for twenty minutes, after a day of complete silence, the poor singer has to work up to the heights of ecstasy with full voice, enough to burst a bugle. And then it is all over, and you are a rag—for what? I'd rather sing an Isolde."

Contrast this with an interview on the same subject given by another soprano some years later:

"I always love the *Siegfried* Brünnhilde. I can have a perfectly free day for myself, and plenty of time for rest and preparation after dinner before going to the theater. Even then I can relax a bit on my rocky bed and get used to the feel of the set before I have to sing. Best of all, I get paid as much for that short scene as for the whole of *Tristan und Isolde*."

Whatever her problems, Fremstad succeeded in overcoming them. Her awakening Brünnhilde was one of the most glorious in all her gallery of heroic portraits. The high *tessitura* of the part is fairly consistent and, once up there, she had no trouble.

\* In recent years these have been left in upright position, although contrary to Wagner's directions.

The hole in the Fremstad voice, noticeable only when she was tired, occurred between the two registers and was attributable to those early years spent laboring in the contralto field. No human being, or goddess either, ever poured forth such noble and soaring rapture of song as she in her greeting to Siegfried. It was exciting, disturbing, and dream-ridden, and her dramatic portrayal was both Olympian and full of warm, human passion.

Having survived the excursions to Brooklyn and to Philadelphia, we returned for a single *Siegfried* at the Metropolitan, which was treated by the public as somewhat of a celebration—New York's first glimpse of Olive Fremstad since before Christmas. There were almost more curtain calls than I could count and so many flowers that every bathtub in the new apartment was requisitioned to hold them that night. Whether repercussions of this ovation inspired the first active resentment of a rival Brünnhilde one can only guess, but almost certainly some influence was brought to bear, for Madame was presently confronted by Mr. Gatti with a rather disturbing proposition.

"*Cara*," he said smoothly, "you have not been well. Do you not think it might hasten your complete recovery if you were to take a little tour and experience a change of climate?"

"It would be very nice," agreed Fremstad, thinking of Florida or Bermuda, "but I have already forfeited six *cachets*. I can afford no more."

Mr. Gatti smiled in his enigmatic way, and put his thumbs in the armholes of his vest as he always did when he had something to negotiate in which the odds were all in his favor. "You will lose no money this way, *carina*. We are loaning you to the Chicago Company for four performances. You will return here in the second week of February for *Armide*. You always enjoy that!"

"Yes," said Fremstad, "I do—and no one else sings it so there will be peace on earth. Dear Mr. Gatti, how transparent you are!"

He shrugged his great shoulders and leaned farther back in his chair and veiled his eyes. "Two Brünnhildes and two Isoldes

—Chicago, St. Paul, and St. Louis. The change will do you good.”

“Perhaps, perhaps not—it is the middle of the winter and very cold. But I shall have a chance to see my family, at any rate. *Tante gracie, Signore!*”

Four days later we were on the train, leaving behind us with considerable relief the unfair field and favors.

## Chapter 16

THIS WAS my first experience of “the road,” although scarcely a typical one. I always enjoyed these journeys even if a large number of crises and calamities could be predicted with certainty from the moment we entrained. After this initial experiment, the practice of taking along a maid was abandoned, although it was a futile economy, for both her expenses and mine were, by contract, the obligation of the company. Mimi, however, was always a member of the party, and on concert tours an accompanist, a press agent, and often a manager came along as well.

I suppose that with the entire responsibility for everything but actual performances on my shoulders, I might have wavered a little, but on the contrary, I considered these excursions rather a holiday. There was, first of all, a blessed relief from my recurring nightmare, the servant problem. Then there was the splendid luxury in which we traveled, occupying, as a matter of course, the finest drawing rooms on trains and the “presidential” or “bridal” suites of all hotels. The principal form of vegetation encountered along the way was a succession of bouquets, usually American Beauties; and our arrivals and departures were heralded in the local press and greeted by curious stares, whispers, and shy salutations which I, for one, found pleasing, although Madame always pulled down her white veil

and strode briskly through the station, pretending an indifference she did not feel. It would have been the *absence* of any such manifestations which would have disturbed her.

I gave a great deal of thought in those days to my own role. It was my ambition, for the greater glory of my employer, to impersonate the dream secretary; impeccably attired, perfectly behaved; full of character and competence, but properly self-effacing. At the opera house I went about my duties in pastel linen smocks, but on the road the problem was more delicate. I finally evolved a costume which seemed to me both tactful and chic: I affected dark wool frocks with fine embroidered collars and cuffs, a velvet cloche and fur-trimmed coat, with sensible footwear given just the essential touch of elegance by the addition of fawn-colored spats. When Madame made no comment upon my appearance, all was well. But if Mother (who worried constantly that my youth was slipping by devoid of natural girlish frivolities) persuaded me to add a feather or a furbelow to the above uniform, I was promptly ordered to pluck it forth. Madame, however, had her own way of guiding my taste. For ornament she bought me a ring to wear which she considered appropriate to my station, and it was no cheap "costume" item either. It was a fine black opal set in gold and enamel, for my little finger. It looked tailored and at the same time opulent, and I was the happiest girl in the U.S.A.

The ritual of train travel was fixed and unalterable. On entering our drawing room the porter was immediately persuaded to produce two extra sheets and soak them well in hot water. One was then folded across the window; the other was pinned like a curtain in the doorway; and both were liberally sprayed with oil of pine. This was not a prima donna caprice but simply a good practical, if clumsy, way to moisten the arid, dusty air for a sensitive throat. However, it was always a great nuisance and was quite a surprise to anyone who sought innocently to pass through the door. I had the liveliest sympathy for the porter, who had probably seen many strange things in the course of his duties but never anything as bewildering as this.

Madame liked to go to the dining car for her meals, for she detested lukewarm food. Our procession through the train must have produced an odd effect, for she always wore a veil over her nose and mouth like an houri, and I, no matter what the weather, would carry a large muff. This latter was not an affectation designed for the dream secretary; the muff was Mimi. We slipped her into a velvet bag with black-fox fur edging and thrust her head through a hole in front. The illusion was perfect unless she barked. Then we had some explaining to do. Dogs were not allowed in Pullmans, and if Mimi were banished to the baggage car, then I should have to go along too and hold her paw. With so much at stake I was naturally quite nervous and my appetite declined, for the muff kept showing far too lively an interest in the contents of my plate. The strain was great and the whole meal tense, and yet if I complained or was even mildly unco-operative, Madame would rise and depart in a fine fury, locking herself, hungry and brooding, alone in the drawing room while I coped with the wreckage. This left me free to sit out in the body of the parlor car and listen slyly to the whispers of curious fellow passengers: "Look, that's her secretary!" Or, more cynically, "See, there's the kid that's with her. I bet *her* life is no bed of roses!"

Whenever I overheard anything of this sort, I would draw myself up and glare in rather a good imitation of Madame herself. But usually my temporary exile from grace was quite agreeable, for if there happened to be no vacant chair in our car, I could visit the observation platform or sit placidly in a day coach with a frivolous magazine. This freedom was the more delicious because it never lasted. No sooner would I begin to relax than Madame would be sure to need some immediate service and loud would be the paging and great the uproar until I was found. I usually met her pacing the aisle in a fury, and once restored to her, I could count on voluble reproaches delivered well within public earshot. It seemed to me that there was little liking written on the faces around us as she dealt

thus with me, so I implored her to rebuke me—if she must—in one of her other languages. She saw my point at once and, laughing merrily, burst into a flood of Norwegian. As this happened to be in the Middle West, many of the other passengers understood perfectly what she said and, to my indignant surprise, the tide of sympathy turned promptly away from me. I suppose that it is only natural, when hearing one's mother tongue in an adopted land, to give the speaker your heart.

The hotels were fun, too. Although Fremstad had admired her teacher, Lilli Lehmann, to the point of adulation and had copied her in a hundred ways, she never could quite bring herself to emulate the Lehmann economies, and least of all when on tour. Madame Lehmann is said to have received the highest *cachet* of her time, but she habitually rode to her work at the Metropolitan in the humble streetcar and generally affected thick black cotton stockings for practical daytime wear. Not so Olive Fremstad who in New York always had her own limousine and chauffeur, and on the road, if no welcoming committee put a car at her disposal, hired the best one available at the local livery. Her hosiery was always of the finest silk from Paris and, at a time when this was indeed a daring innovation, she preferred it in shades of taupe, gray, and even sun tan. Her legs were handsome and well worth exploiting; I cannot report on Madame Lehmann's for of course no contemporary portrait presumed to reveal them.

On tour we had to remember that we were always in the public eye, night and day, and not only were silken hose and limousines *de rigueur*, but everything else was in keeping. Our hotel suites consisted of an ornate parlor, with two or three bedrooms and several baths. There would be the inevitable piano, and on it enormous vases of flowers with other gifts of candy, fruit, or whatever the local specialty might be, heaped beneath as if it were Christmas. After Madame had minutely examined the beds, the next step on our arrival was to fill all the bathtubs with steaming water and splashes of more pine oil. This was

supposed not only to moisten the steam-heated air as it did on the train, but to exorcise the ghosts of former occupants' cigars which always seemed to haunt every hotel room.

"Tinka," Madame told me solemnly, "I don't like all this plush; to me, it is vulgar. I am a simple person, I like simple things. But I am caught in the web. Here in America they think you are no good unless you splurge. It makes me sick! But as long as we have to do it, we might as well enjoy ourselves!"

So she would proceed to deck herself in orthodox splendor and we would go out to view the town, and to be viewed. This always entertained me as it was so contrary to Fremstad's nature, so out of character with the serious, single-minded artist who scurried back and forth to her work at the Metropolitan as invisibly as possible. Entering and leaving a hotel was always a conspicuous progress, as these lobbies were the gathering places for newspaper folk as well as the idly curious. Once, in a western city, a fatuous sob sister approached the room clerk just after Fremstad had entered the elevator and gushed, "Oh, aren't you just too thrilled to have that great opera star staying right here?"

"Well," said the clerk, "I see her whenever she goes in and out. She even speaks to me!"

"O-oh, just imagine! What is she like?"

"To tell the truth, miss, she seems as if she could be quite cross."

This was so startling that it was actually reported in the news columns verbatim, and Madame read it as she drank her morning Postum. I expected her to reach for the telephone and demand the man's dismissal forthwith, but after a moment of agitation, she veiled the lightnings in her eyes and shrugged her beautiful shoulders. "We will send him two good seats for the performance, Tinka, that will teach him!"

The opera was *Parsifal*, and I trust that the offender knew whether he was being punished or rewarded—I certainly did not. But we left town on the midnight train and there were no repercussions.



Another thing that I liked about the road was the informality of our association with other members of the company. At home in New York there was no such camaraderie, at least not for Fremstad. Her relation with her colleagues was more in the nature of an armed truce, and I was warned a dozen times not to make friendly overtures to anyone, least of all to Löt-schen, Madame Gadski's daughter, who was not much older than I and who sometimes stood about the dressing room corridor beside me. We never got much further than a shy smile or two, for there was real animosity between our two divas.

I had not quite believed the tales I heard on this score until one night, at the end of the second act of *Die Walküre*, Fremstad, who was singing Sieglinde, came off the stage, her forearm streaming with blood. In alarm I began ministrations with a clean handkerchief, but she shook me off.

"She did it on purpose!" she hissed. "She dragged my arm right across the nails on her breastplate. She wants to keep me from coming out with her for the applause. Ha, but she will be sorry!"

The scratch was long, but fortunately neither deep nor dangerous. Fremstad powdered her nose, arranged her wig, but the blood was allowed to flow unchecked, while Madame Gadski, the Brünnhilde, looked determinedly the other way. Then the curtain descended, the encore drop was lowered, and the artists fell into formation for their parade before the footlights. Wide-eyed I stood there and witnessed one of the most diverting little pantomimes imaginable. Holding hands, as was their deceptively cordial routine, the two sopranos bowed low to the public, smiling and gracious, and by some legerdemain, Fremstad's blood dripped on Gadski's sleeve. Gadski glared, and Fremstad glared back; and then they both bowed and smiled again, sugar-sweet, to the audience, and stiffly turning their backs on each other, stalked off, muttering and glowering, toward different sides of the stage. I was entranced and was inclined to titter with delight, but Fremstad quelled me with a

look, and then we had doctors and bandages, and reporters were sent for, and it ceased to be funny.

Another such controversy involved one of the most charming singing actors who ever trod the Metropolitan stage. This was the baritone, Antonio Scotti, who certainly had a vulpine gleam in his eye, but was so amiable that it was impossible to believe ill of him. The bone of contention this time was *Tosca*, a role for which prima donnas wrangled more than for any other in the repertory, principally because of the sure-fire dramatics of the second act. Emma Eames, one of the most beautiful if scarcely one of the fieriest of all *Toscas*, had it plainly stated in her contract with the Metropolitan that while she was a member of the company no one else should sing this role. Geraldine Farrar contented herself with a guarantee of at least three *Toscas* per season. Olive Fremstad took her chances.\*

Scotti was the finest *Scarpia* in the company and it was a satisfaction to any artist to play the second scene with him. I am glad that the "incident" involving Fremstad took place before my time for I would have found it very hard to take sides against him. I barely escaped being a witness, however, for when I first met Madame at the Ansonia Hotel, and throughout the following summer, she wore on her wrist a curious bandage of black elastic with a leaden weight which pressed down an inflamed tendon. If such a thing can be said to be becoming, this was. It tapered her wrist and lent something of the distinc-

\* Chance was kind, because it bestowed upon her *Tosca* a unique honor. Her second performance of the role, on Wednesday evening, January 12, 1910, marked the first time an opera was broadcast direct from the stage of the Metropolitan. This was a very simple and primitive version of the elaborate broadcasts which the radio audience now enjoys every Saturday afternoon of the season and during which the singers sometimes sound even better than they are. On this experimental occasion I doubt very much if such was the case. The apparatus used consisted, according to contemporary reports in the press, of "two little boxes about ten inches long called dictographs, placed at the front of the stage, the sound entering through two small holes not more than one half inch in diameter, and wires from these boxes connected with the wireless plant which in turn distributed the vibrations to private telephones." The radius was not much more than fifty miles, but it was heard throughout the city and in suburban New Jersey. The event was received with no very great acclaim, but at least it made history.

tion that a patch over one eye is supposed nowadays to confer. Fremstad claimed that she had received the injury in the violence of the second act where Scarpia so far forgets himself as to pursue around the furniture the lady he lusts for and finally flings her to the floor. Very possibly Fremstad was right and the accident did occur at that time, for it is one of opera's most perilous moments, but her further claim that it was purposely inflicted seems incompatible with Scotti's chivalrous reputation. However, she had some testimony on her side. The fact was that at that particular time Scotti's heart was widely rumored to be in the keeping of the ebullient and youthful Farrar, who loved the role of Tosca as the public loved her in it. Perhaps she was not satisfied with the three performances her contract assured her, or perhaps Scotti was not, for of course he liked best to sing with her. But it is certain that he once refused quite bluntly to rehearse with Fremstad when he was informed that she, instead of Farrar, was to be his Tosca at a performance in Philadelphia. The quarrel was aired rather thoroughly in the press.

Scotti claimed that if Fremstad got her wrist torn in the melee of the scene, it was her own fault for she was a strenuous antagonist. Her Tosca was beautiful, tense, ferocious, reminding one of that hard-working tiger she was always talking about. It lacked Latin warmth perhaps, but Fremstad certainly compensated for this with a display of northern lights which dazzled the eye. Scotti further confessed that he was always scared to death of her, and that the special knife of silvered leather which lay on his supper table and with which she would eventually stab him, had been invented by Crispino, the head "props," as a precaution against the gusts of realism which swept her in the melodramatic finale of the act. I used to creep into the wings as near that table as possible in order to miss nothing of these happenings, and I admit that when Fremstad saw that knife and her hand crept stealthily toward its hilt, my heart stood still. Although I loyally thought that everything Madame did on the stage was beyond criticism, the thorough-

ness with which she stabbed him and stabbed him again, did seem at times excessive. But throughout she was entirely consistent. When she washed her hands so carefully and drew her skirts away from the pool of blood in which her victim supposedly lay sweltering, it was no frail gesture of squeamishness but a sensible precaution if she was to flee through the corridors of the palace unnoticed. When she dropped the crucifix on the corpse with such abandon, it must have bruised poor Scotti's ribs, and one can be sure that he was relieved when she withdrew at last and the curtain fell. It is reported that Scotti eventually begged the management to substitute Amato for him in the part of Scarpia on Fremstad nights, and his advice seems to have been followed during the greater part of those seasons when I was in attendance. But Fremstad ran circles around that genial and gentler singer and I think in her heart she preferred the smoke of battle and missed her arch-antagonist. It is consoling to remember that her last Tosca at the Metropolitan was sung to Scotti's Scarpia, with Toscanini conducting, and that all was sweetness and light.

I was responsible for another little rift with a colleague, this time with none other than Madame Frances Alda, who was then the powerful Signora Gatti-Casazza. Madame Fremstad, although she held herself aloof from much that went on at the opera house, gained rather than lost influence thereby, and found herself imitated in various ways. One of these ways was the sudden fashion for having a young girl secretary-companion in one's retinue. Madame Alda had one called Boo, a very nice, quiet English girl, but she was not long on the scene. I don't know whether Alda resented me because I continued to stay on my job, but anyway she got me into trouble.

One morning at a general rehearsal of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Madame Fremstad was on Giulietta's velvet couch and Act II in full swing. I stood pensively regarding her in a nearby *coulisse*, Mimi in my arms, when suddenly Alda loomed at my elbow. "Hello!" she whispered jovially, and leaned over to pat

Mimi's head. "Nice little doggie!" she cooed. "Do let me hold him."

Flattered at this attention from the great lady and suspecting no guile, I put Mimi into her arms. But there were no more caresses. Alda promptly set the animal on the floor, pointed its nose toward the stage and gave it a little shove. "Go on, go find your mistress," she commanded.

Faithful Mimi needed no coaxing, and what was the Grand Canal of Venice to her? With a scamper of delight she dashed across the lighted stage and bounded into Giulietta's lap only a measure or two ahead of the tenor. There was a roar of rage from the podium, a titter rising to a guffaw from the invited audience, the voice died in a gulp in Fremstad's throat, and the contralto laughed so hard that she had to sit down. Of course the act came to an explosive halt and poor little Mimi scuttled behind the scenery, tail between her legs, and was temporarily lost. When Fremstad came over to my *coulisse* prepared to do mayhem or murder, I looked around for Madame Alda to supply my alibi, but she simply wasn't there. Fremstad eventually believed my story, in fact it suited her to do so, for she was convinced that Alda's mischief had more serious implications, and perhaps it did: Giulietta was given to Alda the following season. The incident had a minor sequel which none the less upset Madame. The management caused a large placard to be posted on call boards and in corridors—NO DOGS ALLOWED BACKSTAGE!—and against this edict there was no defense, so the dressing room knew Mimi's cheerful presence no more.

Fremstad had no intimates among her colleagues, although many were mildly friendly. Caruso had great respect for her and occasionally sang Cavaradossi to her Tosca, but he was definitely not pleased with the partnership in Gluck's *Armide*—her great personal triumph—because his role of the knight, Renaud, was comparatively so slight. He bore her no ill will, however, and spent his superabundant leisure in his dressing room evolving one of his famous caricatures. This was a self-

portrait showing Renaud reclining on an informal couch eating a sandwich and fanning himself while bits of his armor lie discarded on the floor at his bare feet. The caption read: "*Qual che faccio in Armida.*" He presented it to Madame with a flourish during an entr'acte and she was enormously pleased and always treasured it.

Everyone liked to sing with Caruso and few were jealous of him for there was no question about his right to his pinnacle. He was unique, however, and it is certain that he had no part in a rather shabby trick played by one of the wags of the company. This was during the spring tour of the Metropolitan and took place in the railroad station of a southern city. When the special train drew in and the artists climbed aboard there was discovered a conspicuous card tacked to the door of one of the better staterooms saying: RESERVED FOR FIRST TENOR! It is reported that the crush of *tenori* trying to enter that door amounted to a small riot.

Madame Louise Homer had six children and mothered everybody, including Olive Fremstad, which was magnanimous of her considering that the soprano had once issued to the press the challenging statement that no really great artist could successfully combine maternity with a professional singing career. Naturally this had given great offense and provoked stinging rebuttal from the deep-voiced mothers in the company, two of whom at least were top-notch public favorites. But Madame Homer had a warm and forgiving heart, and often gave space in her own dressing room to the overflow of bouquets from No. 10, saying, "They claim the smell of flowers is bad for soprano throats. I don't have to fuss."

Madame Homer was very kind to me too, and often took pity on me as I stood wearily on the concrete floor of the corridor. "Come on in and sit down," she would say hospitably while adjusting her make-up. "Let me tell you about my twins." If the tale remained unfinished when she was called to the stage, she would follow the *régis seur* reluctantly, calling back over her shoulder to me, "I'll tell you the rest when I get back!" And

she always did. Dear Madame Homer! I remember her with so much affection, for she helped me over many rough places. But the fact that she had no nerves, in the Fremstad sense, made that temperamental singer frequently remark that she envied her, in tones that unmistakably implied something quite the contrary.

Geraldine Farrar, although some fifteen years younger than Fremstad—or perhaps for that very reason—was a more formidable rival. I do not think Miss Farrar ever felt this very keenly, and I had little opportunity to judge for myself, for during my time these singers never appeared together. They had sung in *Tannhäuser* in former seasons; Farrar the youngest, prettiest Elisabeth ever to contend against the seductions of New York's favorite Venus; but apparently no blood was spilled. When I was hanging around the backstage corridors Miss Farrar often passed me on some errand to that tiny bijou of a dressing room which was hers alone. She was always gracious and friendly, and there was small doubt that she was the Queen Bee of that particular hive. The marked deference accorded her by her fellow workers, high and low, may not have been any greater than that displayed toward Olive Fremstad, but it was of a different quality. Farrar was their darling and, box-officewise, their treasure trove. To be sure she too was expert in the practice of every prima donna guile and wile—she had her tempests of nerves and her tempers too—but there was nothing Olympian about her. She was the great Glamour Girl of her era, and even I, dedicated heart and hands to another singer, felt my pulses quicken and the fatuous smile of the "Gerry-flapper" spread across my face when, in a drift of delicious perfume, trailing furs, plumage, and the sparkle of jewels, she brightened my exile in the drab gray hall.

Years later Miss Farrar and I became not only friends but neighbors. As a newspaperwoman I had stormed her portal without obstacle, and although she never disappointed the press in the matter of setting and regalia, she made no pretense to the grand manner, and would often chat in a shrewd and folksy

way that she could have learned nowhere but in our own New England.

Looking back on those early days in the light of my present relations with this most affable and gracious artist, the convolutions of the Affair of the Purple Eyebrow Pencil seem absurd. At that time it rocked the world for me. In some way Fremstad had acquired from Farrar a treasured bit of make-up which had become indispensable to her stage eyebrows. It must originally have come into Fremstad's possession in a somewhat devious manner, otherwise there would have been no such fuss when eventually it was lost. Its absence threatened ruin to the faces of so many Isoldes, Kundrys, and other beauties that something had to be done. Knowing Miss Farrar as I later did, it would have been so simple just to go to her and say, "Look, that wonderful purple pencil that Madame Fremstad got from you, you know? Do be an angel and tell us where we can get one like it, or if we can't, perhaps, out of the kindness of your heart, will you part with just another tiny snippet?" I am certain that a king-size pencil would have arrived the following day, possibly done up in ribbons and gardenias. As it was, I had to go to Miss Rita Fornia, an excellent artist of secondary rank in the company and a special crony of Farrar's, and enlist her, out of human pity, on my side. I called upon her in the deepest cloak-and-dagger secrecy, and the only gardenias which entered the plot were from me to her in gratitude, after the anonymous appearance one day at the opera house of a little stub of purple wax placed casually on the Fremstad dressing table.

Later, when both Fremstad and Farrar had retired from operatic life, they found it pleasant to have tea together from time to time and exchange retrospective stage gossip. They esteemed each other highly, discreetly avoided any discussion of the contrast in their individual methods, and found that they had much in common. As a matter of fact, Miss Farrar was the last of her old colleagues to visit Fremstad before her death, bringing with her a few bright rays from their mutually effulgent past to il-



illuminate the dark clouds then gathering around the head of the aging tragedienne.

As for Mary Garden, she approached the Fremstad presence as might an acolyte the priestess at the altar. She professed herself one of the most ardent Fremstad admirers, constantly attended performances, sent bushels of flowers and notes of congratulation, even if she rarely came backstage. These two singers knew each other quite well, and it was frequently remarked by acquaintances and even by newspaper reviewers how much they resembled or suggested one another. This was not really so, but they both were authentic "theater rats," as the Germans say, and the pasteboard crown sat on both brows at an identical angle. They had similar instincts for dramatic subtleties and used similar devices. Their repertoires did not then touch—although both had sung Carmen and Tosca—so friendship was possible. Actually, Mary Garden once confessed that she had her eye on Kundry, and Fremstad might not have been altogether indifferent to Thaïs: an interesting exchange.

This friendship promoted, a season or so later, a very treasureable little incident. Miss Garden was making a silent film version of the opera *Thaïs*, a rather hazardous innovation for opera singers at that time. Just how hazardous it actually was would have been difficult to imagine had we not accepted an invitation to witness a portion of it in the making. Olive Fremstad had then already received certain intimations that her membership in the Metropolitan might not be eternal and was tentatively casting about for other fields of profitable activity. She was enormously impressed by Miss Garden's enterprise and hardihood in essaying this new medium and readily agreed to visit the studio and observe with her own eyes the mysteries in operation.

So, on the coldest possible morning of a very snowy February, we crossed the Hudson to Fort Lee on this novel errand. There, in a vast and echoing steel, concrete and glass structure,

which provided as much illusion of North African glamour and warmth as might an empty car barn wide open to the arctic blasts, we were escorted to a relatively sheltered corner where a rather pallid evocation of Alexandrian revels was in progress. Miss Garden, simply clad in two or three odd wisps of rose-colored chiffon (a wide departure from that ultra-respectable and opaque garment which, on the operatic stage, was supposed so wildly to inflame all beholders), was standing a little apart from the cavortings of a meager *corps de ballet*, her chattering teeth greatly impeding the welcoming smile with which she attempted to greet us. She was listening with pardonably frigid politeness to the words of a stage director.

"Look, dear," the man was saying, "you'll be lying on this couch, see, and you've got this mirror in your hand. You hold it up high, like this—get me? And then you . . ." He rambled on and on while Miss Garden fixed a glazed eye upon him and stoically heard him through to the end. When at last he ran out of words, she tossed her head, strode firmly over to the couch and said, "Thank you: now I will show you how *I'm going to do it!*"

A little later, during a brief intermission between endless repetitions of the couch episode, while poor *Thaïs*, her flesh blue and quivering beneath her garish ocher make-up, was sipping some lukewarm tea, Fremstad exclaimed, "My God, Mary, you must be quite mad! Why do you let yourself in for anything like this?"

Miss Garden answered by tracing with one stiff finger in the icy air the cabalistic sign of the dollar. "Only that and nothing else!" she declared, adding, "But even so, it's not worth it . . . so DON'T!"

I suppose the public eventually was shown this Fort Lee version of *Thaïs* on the screen, but we missed it and were unaware of its appropriately cold reception. At any rate no motion picture offer ever tempted Olive Fremstad after that, and she always looked gratefully upon Mary Garden as her savior.

Apart from such occasional flurries, Fremstad's relation with her professional associates was always on the formal side. And the men of the company were—during the season at least—kept firmly at arm's length.

Not so on the road. There were visits back and forth to other cars, pleasant chats and card games. Even I was accepted here as something more than a familiar shadow, and was enormously flattered when, from time to time, one of the awesome beings whom I had worshiped from afar actually sat down beside me and seemed to enjoy my company. I could never understand this phenomenon, for I had little to contribute then but wide-eyed wonder. But on the whole, I suppose that was a fairly acceptable contribution.

There was even an incident one evening which set my maidenly heart all aflutter with a curdling mixture of pride and shame. Today no girl-child above the age of ten could possibly imagine my panic when one of the leading tenors of the company, known to me heretofore only in the conventional trappings of his roles, glanced into our drawing room, and perceiving me to be alone there, entered and locked the door behind him. I felt exactly like Tosca, and retreated to the farthest corner, prepared for the worst.

Backstage at the opera I had often observed this singer at work. Although an American, he had a reputation for temperamental fancies, and one of these was the superstition that, for luck, he must kiss his wife each time he stepped upon the stage. I had been greatly entertained watching that agile and devoted lady, whenever the singer's assignment called for a number of exits and entrances, racing frantically about backstage in order to be at hand when required. She once told me, during one of her more stationary moments, that a whim which she found even more taxing was her husband's resentment of other people sleeping when he was suffering from insomnia. It appeared that he would pace the apartment blowing a whistle or pounding a tin pan until the whole household was as wide awake as he.

So here was the great man misbehaving for my benefit alone! In my foolish heart I was, of course, inordinately flattered, but my decorous upbringing prompted me to toss my head and bid him unhand me in such a prissy display of outraged virtue that he lost interest at once and airily departed without a struggle. I carefully avoided him for the remainder of the season, but he seemed to bear me no resentment and was inclined to laugh merrily if he chanced to catch my eye. His cavalier attitude offended me, for the adventure had been no light matter to me. I was quite used to rebuffing the fumbling attentions of various attachés behind the scenes when I stood defenseless in a *coulisse*, but this incident had been on a higher level and my humiliation the greater.

## Chapter 17

I NEVER TOLD Madame about the foregoing episode for I was uncertain whether she would consider such goings-on to be trespassing on her territory or mere brazenness on my part. In any event, I once had the gratification of turning the tables and actually playing duenna to Madame herself, although she would instantly have repudiated such a notion. I was sitting in the theater one morning during a rehearsal, when the Wotan of the cast, not occupied on stage for the moment, dropped into the empty chair beside me. Presently, to my astonishment, he bent his head toward mine and began to whisper in my ear.

"Do you know that our friend up there is getting herself talked about?"

I smiled happily at him, having entirely missed the point. I thought that he was speaking of popular acclaim.

But thus encouraged, he continued, "Yes, my dear, a certain *contralto* is busying herself spreading poisonous reports concerning one of her ex-husbands and Olive."

I bristled. "Why, how ridiculous! She scarcely even knows him. He's been to the apartment just twice on business; he wants to be an agent, I believe."

Wotan nodded. "I said there could be nothing in it, and guess why, Miss Watkins! I insisted that no one would keep a sweet, unsophisticated young girl like you around her all the time and indulge in any such indiscretions!"

This gave me a deep inner satisfaction; I felt that now I was really earning my salt. The incident had touched upon a side of Madame's life about which the press and public were insatiably curious and always hounded me unmercifully wherever we went. Everyone wanted to know all about the love life of Olive Fremstad, and many were the inducements I was offered in the effort to make me talk. But I could not have satisfied them, even had I been so disloyal; for in all the seven years that I was Madame's buffer I saw nothing, heard nothing, and, like the third wise monkey, said nothing. To tell the truth, this had been one of the greatest surprises in store for me when I exchanged the chaste pattern of rectory life for the alleged intemperance of Broadway and 39th Street. According to my personal observation at that time, there was far more scandal to be found in a small country town than in the romantic corridors of the opera house.

Of course Olive Fremstad had men friends. Quite apart from the incandescent quality of her stage personality, she was a woman of too much fascination, spirit, and wit to move contentedly in a manless world. In fact, she constantly complained that there were far too many "skirts" around her—looking accusingly at Mimi and me the while.

Various men sent her flowers and presents and came with a certain degree of regularity to the dressing room and to the apartment. They drank her *akvavit*, and even downed uncomplainingly the terrible cocktails I mixed for them. Sometimes they were invited to go with her for long country drives, but much to their disgust, I daresay, I frequently went along too. If they were lovers, they were certainly the least exigent of the

species. Madame herself always demanded much, however; not material tribute, but distinction of person, of mind, and of manners. The one thing for which there was never any room in her life was mediocrity. She saw to it that her own conduct embarrassed no one and she required the same of others if they wished to linger in her train. Her attitude toward the male was sometimes a trifle arch, but very, very circumspect; and she was given to Victorian affectations of prudery, even though patently absurd and never very convincing.

Gossip still persists that she was involved in one or two fairly serious entanglements even under my innocent chaperonage, not including, however, the one which had so worried Wotan. But I find the whole idea incredible, quite apart from her own protestations on the subject. If she conducted any such affairs, it must have been in an astral body, for no operatic contralto in that eternal role of "confidante" was ever in more faithful, ubiquitous attendance than Olive Fremstad's Tinka. It would have taken a good deal more dust than was ever raised, to dim my gimlet eye.

The quaint idea of a liaison in absentia or astral body reminds me of two such which materialized, or rather, threatened to do so. For a time during my first year as buffer, when I opened the big daily bundles of what is now known as fan mail, I encountered a most persistent series of letters postmarked, in succession, from nearly every country in Europe, including Montenegro. The writer was completely unknown to Madame, but had only a bowing acquaintance with English, so I had to show these communications to her for translation. They filled her with increasing alarm, for this self-styled suitor was obviously quite mad. In extravagant phrases he implored her to marry him, adding that if she would not, at least she must "let him alone to live his life in peace." He reproached her for "following him about wherever he went," even intruding in his dreams, and confessed that his frantic journeys from country to country were dictated by the hope of escaping from her. His obsession dated from a time when he had seen her in New York

as Kundry, and he said that he fled from her on the first boat. Naturally Madame did not answer these ravings, but I think that her real terror of encountering him had something to do with her plan to remain in America that summer. I, however, my pity stirred by the poor man's sufferings, wrote him a secretarial but solicitous little letter containing the fiction that Madame Fremstad was already married to a violent and jealous man who would surely kill him if he annoyed her further. I ended on a motherly note, advising him to see a doctor. We heard no more.

The other case was that of an American—out of the wild West, in fact—and was rather touching. It happened several years before I came on duty, but a reporter managed to get hold of the story and it was spread widely in the press. Some simple fellow with a lonely heart and a yearning for home and family happened one day upon an illustrated account of the famous Fremstad Salome. Whatever made him think that the daughter of Herodias, or any woman capable of playing her so sensationally, would make a good wife for a Nebraska farmer is a mystery, but anyway, here is the letter he wrote her, sincerity and good will shining from every line.

DEAR MISS FREMSTAD:

You are unique in the world. I would bet my last dollar against a match that there is nothing in the whole universe for you but the sacred interest of art.

I too am alone in the world. I am six foot high, have a fine position, blue eyes like yours, all my hair, and much landed property.

Will you marry me? I will buy a piano.

I would rather that my head were in your hands—even if it was on a dish like John's—than that it remained on my shoulders and me to be the husband of any girl you like in the whole of Nebraska.

Here is a stamp for reply. Yours truly, X. . . . .

[I imagine that Mr. Sutphen, who was still around at that time, used the stamp promptly and to good effect.

Apart from such lunatic intrusions, it seemed to me that Madame led the life of a nun, espoused only—as her Nebraska suitor suspected—to that religion which was her work. From the very beginning of her career, however, rumor has linked her name romantically with that of James Huneker, the celebrated critic and writer, and she could still be teased about him for years after she retired. Although she always protested vigorously (even while smiling a little telltale smile), proof that there was indeed some ground for her embarrassment exists today among thousands of less sentimental documents assembled in the Library of Dartmouth College. This seems fantastic until it is recalled that Mrs. Huneker, on the death of her husband, was persuaded to donate his private papers to this institution, and among his old letters, dated in the 90's, are a number from Olive Fremstad. It is sad that they should be there at all, but the more so because she has carefully added at the close of almost every one, her hope that Jimmie will destroy the letter as soon as read.

Jimmie did not. He may have had a premonition that the handsome young Rhine-daughter and Valkyrie then trying her first operatic wings at Bayreuth was going to be famous someday. However, the exposure of these intimate effusions to the public gaze is not entirely to be deplored, for they reveal her quite clearly as a young person not only possessed of endearing charm, temperament, and imagination, but as one governed by high ideals. She had her own moral code and what she did herself was her own responsibility, but when others were affected, she could be very strict. It seems that Huneker one day left Bayreuth rather suddenly for Paris under some pretext or other that she suspected. A letter to him from Olive concerning this flight reveals a little natural bruising of the heart, but more particularly a righteous indignation over his behavior—not toward herself but toward another girl! She evidently had cause to believe that such a girl was then in Paris and that a formal engagement to young Huneker existed. She wrote succinctly and in a bold, clear hand that could not be misread, that if



such was really the case, then Jim had done this girl a great wrong and he must not come back to Bayreuth, for all that had been between them there must be instantly finished and forgotten. There follows a hiatus in the correspondence, but although it was resumed more casually a little later, there is no hint of the sequel. The fact remains that Huneker continued to be one of her most ardent admirers, that as a New York critic he wrote with ever-increasing enthusiasm about her artistic achievements, that he put hints of her into his one novel, and even in my day was frequently a visitor at the theater and at home. However, it is a matter of record that Fremstad went to his funeral in company with Mrs. Huneker herself, and was so observed by all, to the confounding of the gossips.

Another early affair which has become part of operatic legend was the youthful Fremstad's alleged bewitchment of Lilli Lehmann's husband, the tenor Paul Kalisch. This romance is supposed to have been carried to the point of elopement, but the truth has been lost in the malicious scandalmongering of the past. What is certain is that Herr Kalisch played no part in Olive Fremstad's subsequent career; however, it is equally certain that her association with Frau Lilli must have terminated on a discordant note, for although Fremstad continued to idolize and extol her former teacher, there was a marked lack of response on the other side. Even in 1950, when at the request of Geraldine Farrar, I went to call on Lehmann's aging but still worshipful niece, the late Fräulein Hedwig Helbig, I ventured innocently to remark, "I knew very well indeed another friend and pupil of your illustrious aunt—Olive Fremstad."

Fräulein Helbig was very polite, but her sunken eyes snapped. "Ach yes," she answered, "a very great artist, but a great friend—no!"

Teacher and pupil sang together on several occasions, however, and one of Fremstad's most precious memories was of a performance of *Tristan* in Vienna, when she was the Brangäne to Lehmann's Isolde. It always amused her to recall that,

at the end of Act I, which is certainly strenuous enough to heat the blood of any singing actress, Lehmann beckoned to her during the brief moment before the applause summoned them to the footlights, saying, "I wish you to put your hand down my back under my wig and cloak."

This strange request somewhat baffled the younger singer, but she was accustomed to doing what she was told and obediently ran a respectful finger down the erect and handsome spine.

"Observe," said Frau Lilli pridefully, "not even my undershirt is damp!" Fremstad took this to mean that the stalwart artist was boasting a little because of reserve powers beyond the extremest Wagnerian demands. But the incident is capable of several interpretations, one being that Lilli Lehmann-Kalisch was not going to let herself get all hot and bothered under any circumstances, and meant Fräulein Fremstad to know it.

Probably the most constant among all of Fremstad's men friends was Charlie Dyer, the bearded gentleman I had encountered on my first visit to the Venus dressing room. He had known her long and well but, according to her, without sentimental attachment. I loved to listen to his stories of her early conquests. "My dear Tinka, you cannot imagine what a fire-brand she was, and beautiful as the dawn! She was in love with life and with art, and every young man she met fell flat on his face before her. Before she ever went to Europe at all, or even knew how to dress very well, she toured the East in a series of concerts with Anton Seidl. One of these was in my town of New Haven. When she sang their own songs to the Yale boys, my God, Tinka, there was a perfect holocaust of broken hearts! Yet she didn't care terribly about this kind of thing either, all she really cared about was the career ahead of her. If it happened that her endowments included beauty and magnetism and high spirits, so much the better, as long as they did not interfere with her work."

Years later she herself expressed this more quaintly when she said, in answer to gossip in the press, "A serious artist can't

have lovers and still *think!*" Olive Fremstad did a vast amount of thinking and her great roles were always composed not only in her heart but in her head.

As for her male colleagues, a great favorite was Clarence Whitehill, the baritone who eventually became a Metropolitan star but at the time of my first trip West was a member of the Chicago Company. Mr. Whitehill looked like George Washington and moved in an aura of great good breeding. His grooming was faultless and he knew how to wear with ease and grace the clothes of any period, from the rough tunic of Kurvenal to his own presumably Saville Row tweeds. He was an amiable traveling companion who saw to porters, brought snacks to our drawing room, and told us fascinating tales full of wry humor. I, quite naturally, fell into a state of silent worship, and even Madame lowered her guard a little in his presence. I think it was a blow to both of us when, one bleak morning en route to St. Louis, he abruptly announced that he was soon to be married, adding complacently, "Yes, I've got myself the last of the good wives!" I certainly never aspired to be Mrs. Whitehill, but I had hoped eventually to be a good wife to somebody, and it depressed me to hear that except for one example—and not me—the species was now extinct.

Perhaps Whitehill made this announcement so early in the morning for the express purpose of neutralizing a rather emotional incident which had occurred the previous night. He had been the Wotan and Fremstad the Brünnhilde in a performance of *Die Walküre* in Minneapolis. This had proved to be one of those inexplicably surcharged and exciting performances which occur rarely, and when they do, leave the audience profoundly shaken. The Magic Fire crackled on that stage long before its appointed time, and during the last act leaped high in the eyes of both the singers. Fremstad, always beautiful in this role, was quite unearthly that night. When the moment came for Wotan's kiss which deprives the Valkyrie of her godhead, she sank into his arms in a flood of real tears and sobbed her heart out against his roughly armored breast. He kissed her again and

again and enfolded her in the tenderest of brooding embraces. When the music permitted, he scolded her too. From my place in the nearby wings I, also in tears by this time, heard him whisper: "You can't do this to me! I've still got to sing, damn it!"—and he kissed her once more.

When it was all over, he came to her dressing room. "Look, dear," he said, "if this happens in St. Louis my career is ruined. I'm the most susceptible man in the world and this is the limit. Promise me to behave!"

Fremstad by this time had recovered; she had repaired her make-up and was ready to greet her visitors who were already thundering in the corridor. "Don't worry, Whitehill," she said, her eyes dark and disturbing above the pale folds of her shawl, "you had nothing to do with it. I grew up in this city, and beloved ghosts were all around me tonight."

Her reception in Minneapolis and its twin, St. Paul, was always attended by uncertainties. She had indeed grown up there and had there inaugurated her career. At one time she had sung in the choirs of so many churches simultaneously that on a Sunday morning she literally had to run from one to the other in order to arrive punctually for her solos. She had heard her first opera in this city, *Il Trovatore*, done by the elder Mapleson's itinerant company which often augmented its chorus by engaging local singing societies. In this instance her golden-voiced preacher father was in the group. The young Livan was ill at home, just recovering from the throes of typhoid fever, but quite unable to bear the disappointment of missing such a musical treat, she waited until the family had departed, then pausing only to put on slippers and wrapper stole out secretly to the theater. There she pleaded so desperately with the box office staff to let her in that, frightened by her wild looks and burning cheeks, they passed her through. Cowering somewhere in the shadows of the topmost gallery, she forgot her weakness and pain in the bewildering joy of the

spectacle and the music which was one day in faraway Cologne, Germany, to support her own operatic debut in the role of Azucena. Little Livan paid for this adventure by a relapse which came very near ending her career before it began, but I doubt if she ever regretted the risk she had taken, and from that rash evening onward she knew exactly where she wished the path of her life to lead.

In Minneapolis at the time of our visit, there were still living many who had known her "when," and also singers who had been her fellow students, had sung with her in the cast of an amateur *Iolanthe* and other youthful stage ventures, who had been equally ambitious but less talented, and who were still right where they started. Now every time the mature, triumphant Fremstad passed through the city, many of these swarmed about her, basking in the reflected glory, but others were bitter and tried publicly to belittle her success. Madame had no desire to be caught in this crossfire and for the first time in her professional life refused to receive the press, bidding me make her excuses. All that appeared in the local papers next day was a flip little item about the secretary whom Madame Fremstad had imported from England for her specialized skill in getting her employer out of tight places. Madame read it, laughed and said she supposed I would want my salary raised. I said no, but why had they thought me English? "Oh, that . . . well, you have neither a Scandinavian accent nor a Midwestern R, thank God, Tinka! So London was all that they could think of. Now don't go feeling too important!"

She did not raise my salary, but one day when we were out for a drive she dropped a little diamond ring into my lap which she had even taken the trouble to have marked inside with the date.

A certain unworthy citizen of Minneapolis had caused even more trouble some years before my time. Long ago when little Livan Fremstad was living out on the prairie with her family and having some trouble with the strange new language, her parents decided that it would be best for her to learn American

ways by going to the city and taking a position as mother's helper while attending school there. This duly came about and Livan spent a year or more in Minneapolis with a family which deserves no more identification than the letter F. There was no question of wages for the child. She presumably earned her board and keep and was otherwise treated just like the children of the house. But she worked hard both at home and at school and learned much.

Later, when the thin, tired little girl grew up, went abroad, and became an international star, the F——s had moved to Springfield, Massachusetts, and, as in a fairy tale, the great Fremstad was engaged one spring for an appearance at the famous Music Festival there. When Mr F read the announcement and noted the price of the tickets, he obeyed an ignoble impulse and not only complained lustily to his friends, but unburdened himself in a letter to the newspapers to the effect that he was certainly not going to pay any such sum to hear a woman sing who had once been just an ignorant servant in his kitchen. At that time everything concerning opera stars was big news and this scurrilous item made a most unpleasant splash in the local press and was echoed extravagantly all across the land. Perhaps the implications were too much for the fastidious Mr. Sutphen, who was then in power, for the singer was most unwisely persuaded to cancel the appearance. She lost thereby not only several thousand dollars but considerable prestige, for her default could all too readily be construed as confirmation of the story—false though it fundamentally was. Years later her concert manager also had cause to complain, for Springfield continued to be a fertile field for musical artists. But Olive Fremstad could never be induced to forgive or to forget, and would have no more traffic with that place.

By the time that I arrived on the scene, Madame had learned to rise above the usual newspaper stories and had accepted the belief, subscribed to by most theatrical folk, that any publicity is better than none; although she was careful not to start any-

thing. But she was still smarting then under what she considered an invasion of her privacy when sensational accounts, embellished with ridiculous illustrations, appeared the day after she arrived from Europe the previous season. FREMSTAD HAS A VALET INSTEAD OF A LADY'S MAID! proclaimed the headlines. One cartoon showed a uniformed youth with his knee in the small of the diva's back drawing up her corset strings; a second pictured a bewigged butler performing various other services of the boudoir. And all because she had brought with her that year a small page to run her errands and sit with the chauffeur on the box of her automobile. Here again we see the fine hand of Mr. Sutphen who placed so much emphasis upon elegance.

He had nothing to do, however, with the monocle which she was wearing on another occasion when she arrived from Europe. Recently in London she had observed these objects in common use, and, as one of her eyes sometimes gave her trouble, decided to adopt the style herself. Of course she was perfectly well aware that a monocle in the eye of a glamorous opera star was both unusual and chic, and would, moreover, serve as an excellent conversation piece; but she met the situation without the proper humor and that made it all the funnier.

"I come back with an important new role in preparation, but does anyone show the slightest interest? No—they just keep on talking about this wretched piece of glass!"

When a reporter puckishly suggested that she give it to Wotan to replace the eye which he had so gallantly exchanged for Fricka, she was outraged. "Certainly not!" she snapped indignantly. "Only think how it would reflect the footlights!"

When pressed further by this same wag she denied with perfect seriousness that she would wear it on the stage. "Because I could scarcely cover it with pink court plaster as I do my wedding ring, could I?" I have always thought that for this arrant bit of nonsense she richly deserved every comic exaggeration, tasteless or not, which the newspapers wrung from the

incident. It must have plagued her considerably, however, for she later tore most of the clippings concerning both the monacle and the valet from the pages of her scrapbooks.



The ghosts which haunted Olive Fremstad on the stage of the Minneapolis opera house that night of the tearful Brünnhilde had been the members of her lost family circle whose memory she cherished with a tender devotion which, she once confessed to me, she had not always found time to demonstrate while the circle was intact. To be sure, she had made various dutiful gestures. She had hurried straight from a performance of *Venus* on a wild dash by night-train and car in order to sing at her mother's funeral, and she kept pictures of both her parents in handsome golden frames on her bedroom wall, instructing me to put vases of flowers beneath them on the anniversaries of their births and deaths; an appealing little service which I faithfully performed.

The family had been a large one, all of the children having pious Biblical names. Not only the parents, but two of the sisters had died before I met Madame. There was the little Esther who had succumbed in early youth—a pretty, gentle child whom the busy prima donna, journeying up and down the world, had scarcely ever seen; and there was Marie. Of them all it was this dark-haired sister who haunted Livan most poignantly, following her through all the triumphs of her career with great reproachful eyes. Marie was the beauty of the family, the last of the children to be born in the old country and, according to all who knew her, a charmer from her cradle. Some years younger than Livan, she had, it is said, an equally lovely voice and presence, but there was no iron in her soul. She was sweet, gay, and loving; good times appealed to her more than hard work.

Marie went abroad as a student with her elder sister, but the harsh precepts of Lilli Lehmann, the fanatical zeal and consuming energy of sister Livan unnerved her, and her efforts to keep pace with them soon declined. Presumably at the sug-



gestion of Frau Lilli, who never dallied with the faint-hearted, she was eventually shipped home and Olive became the sole hostage of the Fremstad family to fortune. The rigors of Marie's German experience were never quite forgotten but were in no sense responsible for her eventual decline and early death. It is possible that incipient disease was accountable for Marie's lack of stamina, but Olive the hardy and relentless, tortured herself for the rest of her life because she felt that she had failed to understand and therefore rejected the sister dearest to her heart.

The surviving members of the family were Joseph, Reuben, and Rachel. The first of these was, at the time I knew him, a pioneer surgeon in the wildest district of Idaho. He was closest in age, temperament, and appearance to his famous sister, and although they saw each other very seldom, there was always a strong bond between them of mutual pride in each other's accomplishments and he alone could share with her the endearing memories of childhood.

Reuben, the younger brother, was a musician. He was a great hulking Viking of a fellow, with huge shoulders and a broad red face over which hovered always a shy and ingratiating smile. When she encountered him unexpectedly on our first tour of the West, sister Livan was so pleased with him that she gave him a gold-lined trombone engraved with hearts and flowers. If she could have found a jeweled one, she would have immediately bought him that. She teased him unmercifully, petted him, and overfed him much as she did Mimi, and kept him beside her in what was obviously, to him, galling luxury and idleness. Then, overnight, she suddenly grew tired of the new toy and sent him on his way with her blessing and a large check.

Rachel was married and living right in Minneapolis at the time of my initial visit there. She had a small son, Malcolm Oliver, named for his distinguished aunt, and the apple of her eye. He and his mother came to see us at the hotel shortly after we arrived, and great was the excitement. Madame's first impulse, when she encountered members of her family, was to write out checks for them, whether they were in need of funds

or not. Perhaps she was thus seeking to ease her conscience a little for the years when, busy building her career, she might have seemed neglectful. But her purse was not wider open than her heart although it showed more; she worried and fussed over her family during all the time that I knew her, and often seemed to feel on her own shoulders the entire responsibility for their welfare. Unfortunately, her way of showing this concern when she was with them was somewhat disaffecting. She gave vent to her love for them by scolding, by criticism, by gratuitous advice, and if their answering looks darkened, she would turn to me in despair and cry, "You see, Tinka, how alone I am!"

More than anything else, she wanted the affection of the boy Malcolm. She was devoted to him and wished him to have every advantage—and one of these advantages which had never failed her and in which she believed with her whole heart was, of course, *hard work*! Malcolm at the age of nine was expected to undertake some sort of actual labor, and when his mother indignantly opposed the idea, Aunt Olive grew puzzled and resentful. Later on she bowed to the inevitable, relaxed her severity and sent him to a good private school, even taking him with her to Europe one summer in shameless luxury. She won his gratitude and respect, if not his love, and on the whole, he pleased her well. When he was killed in World War II she mourned him so deeply that she could not understand how even Rachel, his mother, could feel an equal grief. Rachel generously allowed her this solace and said little.

This married sister was six or seven years older than I, but very girlish and merry, and I took to her at once. She tells me that she felt sorry for me when we first met because I seemed so concerned about the clothes that Madame was selecting to wear for lunch, while my own slip sagged dismally beneath the hem of my dress, my hair was uncombed, and obviously I had not had time to look at myself in a mirror for days. Rachel was a gentle creature and always seemed a little awed in the presence of her illustrious older sister. But she had been endowed with a much keener sense of humor, and in spite of her some-

times vague and flustered manner, had a crisp and definite will of her own. No one was allowed to tread on her toes without protest, and frequently she astonished even stern sister Livan with her self-control and tenacity of purpose. Through the years I came to know her well and we had merry times together in attendance on Madame, often in a tense situation finding relief in a hearty laugh which no one else could share.

Even that first day at lunch her eyes met mine in appreciative mirth as she observed the ritual of the meal. I had already learned that no matter what dish I might order for myself, it would, when served, attract Madame more than her own selection and she would insist on changing with me. So I adopted the strategy of urging *her* to order food that *I* liked and which I knew I would inevitably have thrust upon me. This usually worked out well, but although meals in a restaurant were often more successful than those prepared in our home kitchen, the ceremony of eating them was attended by alarms and excursions. There was, first of all, the matter of real or suspected draughts, which often caused us to pick up our plates and flee from table to table; and there was the ubiquitous traveling man with the big black cigar, who could never understand the poisonous glances and angry mutterings directed toward him by the beautiful lady dining nearby.



Thus I served my novitiate on the road. Oddly enough, the most difficult moments were not always in the theater. Fremstad, although she never relaxed her devotional attitude toward her work, was inclined to be less tense and exigent in provincial opera houses. There were occasions, however, when her explosions of temperament had the familiar ring, and were on the whole justified. One of these divertissements occurred in St. Louis, our next stop on that tour. This was a town where Fremstad was enormously popular but which seemed bent upon supplying her with misadventures on almost every visit. The first of these in my experience was at the close of *Die Walküre*,

which was given with the same cast as in Minneapolis but not with the same stage equipment. The fact that there were no steam pipes capable of conveying the illusion of smoke from Loge's fires precipitated a sinister crisis, for some bright young engineer had the idea of substituting chemical fumes instead. When these poured forth in dramatic profusion Wotan began to wheeze and choke and Brünnhilde gasped painfully and threw herself about on her rocky couch regardless of what was supposed to be deep, magic slumber. I stood in the nearest *coulisse* having my own difficulties with throat and eyes when, to my astonishment, I heard Madame say in full voice, "Tinka, are you there? Go at once and tell them that if they don't shut off this stink, I shall get up and walk away right before the public!" Without any doubt a portion of the public heard this threat and eagerly awaited its fulfillment, but the stage director heard her too, the "stink" was smothered, and Brünnhilde resumed her magic sleep without benefit of bonfires.

The second incident is especially memorable to me as it marked my initial—and final, I hoped—appearance on the operatic stage. In New York, as patrons of the Metropolitan well know, there is a small auxiliary curtain let down behind the artists when coming out at an act's end to receive their applause. This serves a dual purpose, supplying them with a becoming background and hiding the activities of the scene shifters who have so little time to spare. The close of almost every opera in which Fremstad sang found her either feigning death or some other prostrating seizure demanded by the libretto, so it became my custom to dash on stage, pick her up and dust her off, plying her with the necessities for a swift renewal of make-up. At the end of the *Tristan* performance in St. Louis I rushed forward to perform this duty as usual, forgetting that in many theaters the main curtains part or rise without any encore drop at all. Thus it came about that a large, enthusiastic audience, lingering for one last glimpse of the visiting stars, was treated to a spectacle which sent them all home convulsed with mirth. There, among the nobly accoutered figures of romance

stood, rooted to the spot in abject terror, a blushing young miss in blue serge and smock, her shaking hands full of throat sprays, mirrors and brushes. At first the bowing artists did not realize that I was there, and Kurvenal, his eyes doubtless blinded by the footlights, even reached a colleguely hand in my direction. But the titters of the spectators soon advised the great ones that there was a commoner in their midst. Fremstad was livid; " 'Raus, um Gotteswillen, Tinka, 'raus!' " she hissed, but I had neither the strength nor courage to cross that vast stage alone, so crawled dazed—and I trust invisible—behind Tristan's bed and remained ingloriously there until the curtain fell. But I was, thereafter, heroine of the hour. The stagehands all congratulated me elaborately and Whitehill invited us to join him in a complimentary beer at the hotel before we went to bed. Madame would have liked very much to laugh, I knew, but decided that, in the interest of discipline, she must refrain.

After these mild inadvertencies we returned to New York for the season's second *Armide*, all in fine spirits and glowing health, just as Signor Gatti had predicted.

## Chapter 18

NO ONE but Olive Fremstad has ever sung the role of *Armide* on the stage of the Metropolitan. This opera had opened the season of 1910-11 and had had a mixed reception, the precarious *succès d'estime* which impresarios regard askance. There was no doubt, however, about Fremstad's personal triumph which was the more remarkable because the classic French style was so alien to her experience and temperament.

At the time of her debut in the part she was interviewed for almost every publication in town, and to one sympathetic reporter she confessed that, in her preparation, the difficulties had seemed overwhelming. It was always her method, in study-

ing any new role, to master the text before turning to the music, which latter, she said, "is much easier for me anyway." To the uninitiated this seems unusual, for words and music are supposed to be inseparable, but it must be remembered that Olive Fremstad was as great an actress as she was a singer—perhaps even greater. Only after she had thoroughly investigated the dramatic range of an impersonation was she ready to extend this conception through the revelations of the music. On the stage itself she welded the two elements together; the process often taking place, in its final development, right before the fascinated eyes and ears of the public. Almost all the critics who wrote about Fremstad mentioned this aspect of her art. The gradual unfolding and steady growth of her interpretations held them spellbound and sent them back again and again to hear her even when not assigned to review the performance.

She studied *Armide* in the little Villa Lerchenreit, on the mountainside in Aussee, and I like to imagine her there in her canvas chair under the plum trees, her wordbook in her lap, and her eyes lifting now and then to the white peaks of the Dachstein across the valley. As I have observed earlier in this record, Fremstad was not at ease with the French language or character. Confronted by this eighteenth century libretto, she confessed herself panic-stricken at first, and then, after she had painfully mastered the grandiose periods, was the more puzzled by the rococo musical setting which Gluck had given them. One of the more impatient critics, who had found the opera long and wearisome, said that the music reminded him of fifty minuets, one right after another. This was untrue and not very funny, but Fremstad herself admitted that at times it seemed quite impossible to make any sense out of it. "I worked," she declared, "until the process gave me chills and fever, and got nowhere at all. It was like trying to climb a glass mountain—I kept slipping back because I could find no footing. But one wonderful day I discovered the secret, and after that it was heaven." She refused to reveal what this secret might be; and when asked, replied with her baffling and faraway look fas-

tened where reportorial eyes could never follow, "Ah, you have only to come and hear a performance!"

I had fortunately done just that during the previous season and she was both surprised and pleased when she found that I knew without prompting what costumes were required for each of the five acts and seven scenes. They were beautiful and barbaric, with more than a hint in them of Kundry; in fact she wore the same blazing scarlet wig. The role itself fitted her like a glove; it permitted her to stalk about in her noble way, to sit on thrones looking like the queen of the world, to rage with resentment, melt with love, let herself go in the seduction scene, and tear her heart to ribbons in the moment of Armide's rejection and despair. The critic Charles Henry Meltzer, brooding upon this impersonation, said that he never ceased to marvel, when he saw the enchantress sitting there in such majesty upon her throne, at the story behind it all—the drab and dreary Western childhood of the singer, her struggles with poverty, and her unceasing labors. He liked to tell of his first meeting with Fremstad. He had been sent to interview her during the season of her Covent Garden debut when she was still virtually unknown outside of Germany. He went behind the scenes in search of her and a stagehand pointed out to him a slender figure in Wagnerian costume and make-up, broodingly pacing up and down in the wings where she would presently make her entrance. Her head was bent in concentration and she seemed totally detached from her surroundings. She glanced up at the approach of the stranger, but without recognition or concern, then resumed her pacing. Mr. Meltzer says that he realized at once that here was a budding artist of the very first rank, so he stole away without disturbing her. "Sure, sir, she's always like that," said the stagehand as he passed again. "Doesn't know she's in this world at all!" Meltzer had his story.

Pitts Sanborn, then critic of the New York *Globe*, went to every performance of *Armide*, he said, just to hear Fremstad's wild exclamation in Act I, "*Ciel, c'est Renaud!*" This must

have been a remarkably projected phrase, for it is constantly mentioned by critics in their reviews, but I, alas, have no memory of it. Much of the time during this opera I was off stage, frantically checking over with Bella and Frau Musauers the next change of costume. I do, however, remember the moment when Armide, dagger in hand, bent above the ungainly figure of the too-well-upholstered Renaud as he reclined in great discomfort upon a flowery bank. Her big aria, "*Enfin il est dans ma puissance*," must have increased his anxiety as he lay defenseless beneath the splendor of her rage. Caruso was not only too fat that season to impersonate successfully a romantic Crusader, but he wore a most unbecoming wig which produced in him a disturbing resemblance to Benjamin Franklin. His supposed charms spared him the stroke of Armide's dagger, but nothing could prevent that embarrassing ordeal when the rose-strewn couch, bearing both his considerable weight and Armide's, must be wafted through the air. The caresses of the lovers at this point had a tense and frantic quality, their smiles frozen on stiff faces as they braced themselves for a series of jerks and jouncings which lifted them, by a sort of hydraulic elevator, four or five feet from the stage. Here they usually stuck fast and the trailing vines and garlands which were designed to mask the mechanism swung so violently with the shock that the foot-lights revealed all, including the elevator man, unless the curtain fell swiftly.

Mr. Toscanini, who took this opera much to heart, made an unusual number of excited invasions of the dressing room during the evening and the atmosphere was electric within and without. But he and Fremstad usually saw eye to eye and the interviews were consultations rather than arguments. He worshiped her in the role and many years later sent her, on her eightieth birthday, a memento inscribed "*To my unforgettable Armida*," which she kept beside her to the last hour of her life.

I always got out of the Maestro's way as speedily as possible, and usually took such occasion, during *Armide*, to go out and



inspect the toy chariot and the baby hippogriffs which were to hurtle a doll-sized enchantress through the clouds at the finale. It is a pity that Fremstad could not have made this flight in person, for she would have enjoyed it, especially with its accompanying rockets and flares which might—or might not—go off as expected. But the cautious stage director, a nervous wreck anyway at the end of four hours in fairyland, preferred the time-honored operatic expedient of having the singer rush off into the wings, to reappear in effigy a moment later. This whole opera was delightfully replete with flights of cupids, demons, and a variety of beasties well calculated to divert the young and frivolous. Perhaps this explains Marie Antoinette's remarks, reflecting the lightheartedness of her pleasure-loving court when, in 1777, the opera received its first presentation in Paris: "Oh, everyone is talking much more about Monsieur Gluck's new work, *Armide*, than about the trouble overseas in America!"

The cast of the Metropolitan *Armide* was a brilliant one under Toscanini's baton. Besides Fremstad it included Caruso, Amato, Dinh Gilly, De Seguro, Homer (replaced later by Matzenauer), Leonora Sparks and Alma Gluck—the latter, as one paper thought best to explain, "no relation whatever to the composer!" It was the first time that I had seen this charming artist at work and I always contrived to be in an adjacent *cou-lisse* to hear her sing the brief but lovely airs of her dual roles, Lucinde and Un Plaisir. None of the artists had anything important to do except Fremstad, and I believe that what finally doomed the opera to retirement was the limited opportunity offered Caruso's compatriots behind the standees' rail for shouting and beating their palms together in their idol's honor.

This, my first and most exciting season as a pseudo-member of the opera company, concluded in Boston, for we were not to go on as far as Atlanta that year. Madame's closing perform-

ance there was followed by a somber incident which, although pure fantasy, was certainly remarkable. For some reason which I cannot now recall, she had elected to stay at a hotel which was not the one scheduled for the rest of the company. This must have been a sudden decision, for the accommodations were not adequate and there was only one bedroom in the suite, which I had to share with her. The morning after the performance I was awakened before dawn by a hoarse, anxious voice from the next bed. "Tinka—Tinka, are you all right, child?"

I roused from comfortable slumber, feeling no pain but that of rude awakening. "Yes, of course, Livan. Was I making a noise?" I muttered apologetically, although I could recall no nightmare.

"No, no! Hush! Something terrible has happened. Don't get out of bed!"

This injunction came too late. I was already leaping in alarm, and had snapped on the light.

"Don't step in it, I tell you! . . . Oh, thank Heaven it isn't there any longer!"

Who was having nightmares now? But no—her bright blue eyes were wide open and staring with horror at the space between her bed and mine. "What, Livan—*what*?" I demanded excitedly.

"*Sei ruhig, Kind!* Of course I couldn't expect you to see it. Go back to sleep now, but as soon as it is light, get dressed and go down and get the papers. There has been a terrible catastrophe!"

She was tragically right. In a few more hours the newspapers were spread before her on the counterpane. Across the top of each front page was flung the horrifying banner: TITANIC SINKS! 1300 LIVES LOST!

I stared at her, white-lipped and amazed. "However could you know?" I gasped. She frowned with pain and leaned her forehead in her hands. "I always know, child. There, between our beds, was an open coffin!"

This macabre experience may also have had something to do with summer plans, for Madame always hated boats and eagerly seized upon any excuse to avoid a sailing. When we returned to New York, only three weeks remained before the departure of the *Kronprinzessin Cecilie*, on which a suite had been booked for us. I was in the throes of an inner conflict; I had been advised in no uncertain terms by my family that I was expected to spend the greater part of this summer at home—but the thought of my diva rushing off to Europe without me to look after her was unbearable! Because she had no professional commitments I was certain that she would go straight to Aussee, and, imagining her there and myself in one of those hateful American summer hotels for which my father had a low and inexplicable taste, I felt like a victim on the rack.

A chance meeting with one of the newer members of the company, a young American soprano, on a morning when we stopped to gather up tag ends at the theater, promptly altered all that. This singer, eager to make friends, fell to chatting with Madame about a little camp which she had on the shores of a lake in Maine where she spent each summer studying with Fremstad's own old teacher who was known to all as Papa Bristol. It had been at his studio in New York that the spirited young Olive had played accompaniments in order to pay for her own lessons, years ago, before she went to Germany. She had always been fond of him, but had seen him little of late and was not aware that he summered in New England with a few hand-picked pupils. To limber her voice with him for a season was a new and comforting idea and she drank in thirstily a rhapsodic description of the tall pines, the hills and the clear bright lakes which were a mere night's journey away. "Now why on earth must I go traipsing across those terrible waves and wear myself out in Europe when everything I need is right here?" she exclaimed, her face alight with the exalted and gratified expression Christopher Columbus must have worn when discovering America.

In no time at all it was settled. Papa Bristol, enchanted by this surprising and profitable turn of events, could not do enough to help, and presently informed us that the camp next door to his own on Long Lake at Harrison, Maine, was available. Madame engaged it on the spot and the *Kronprinzessin* sailed without us.

I can't say that I shared the general enthusiasm, for a typical summer camp on a New England lake was no novelty to me; I had spent all too many holidays in a particularly repulsive example of the species on the shore of Lake Champlain. Moreover, I was quite certain that once the novelty had worn off, my cosmopolitan prima donna would begin making unfavorable comparisons with the Villa Lerchenreit, followed by eruption and flight, greatly inconveniencing everyone as usual.

However, it was arranged that Rachel should come east with Malcolm to take over my responsibilities while I was with my family, and this much settled, for the next fortnight Madame plunged into the excitement of equipping herself with what she considered an appropriate wardrobe for the adventure ahead. This consisted of gingham and khaki garments, all very practical, with a sort of pioneer-woman or Annie Oakley air about them. There were also woolens and tweeds and furs suitable for the North Pole, and high boots, and several pairs of beaded Indian moccasins. Thus prepared, and accompanied by a Hungarian gypsy cook—whom I had engaged on the theory that, since she could speak no English, she would be unable to escape—we entrained in early June for the woods.

It was far too soon; the weather was still bleak, windy and damp. Madame, who had endured unflinchingly the horrors of Karlstein, stood in the entrance of that matchstick, draughty, unlovely Maine cottage, the early morning mists still rising from the lake below, and cried out in pain, "So this is a camp!" Presently an echoing howl arose from the kitchen where Mariska, the gypsy, was investigating the rusty iron cook-stove.

It was really a hateful place, with all the architectural inadequacies that I had feared. The bedroom partitions ended a foot

or so from the ceiling, the wooden walls were like sounding boards. There could be no privacy here, no quiet. But there was an enormous fireplace, there were plenty of pungent pine logs, and best of all, there were unlimited fish to be had at the drop of a hook. Madame, reverting to childhood skills, caught half a dozen perch before supper and fell on them with true Scandinavian appetite. I walked, meantime, to the village store, bought a batch of groceries all pervaded with a vintage aroma of kerosene, and by a great streak of luck also secured some two dozen yards of burlap which I proceeded to tack around the walls of the living room. This served the same purpose as the arras in a medieval castle, and presently the room took on a snugger air. When the "homelike trunk" had been unpacked, the Carmen shawl flung over the battered upright piano, the leopard laid before the fire, the pictures pinned in rows along the burlap, and when Mariska appeared, stomping about in the short red skirts and embroidered aprons of her homeland, the place lost all trace of its native mediocrity and began, oddly enough, to suggest a stage set.

That afternoon, relaxing under two fur rugs on her hard bed for a nap, Madame professed herself delighted; and indeed, as soon as she got to work with Papa Bristol she was as happy as a lark. As usual, only work mattered. But for the rest of us life was now one long irritation. For us there was no shelter, no retreat; the cottage was as public as the stage of the opera house! When Madame decided to study or practice, Mariska and I—and any casual visitor—had to scurry out of sight like theater rats, and make no sound. I wondered what the small Malcolm would do, with his normal-boy inclination to shout and hop about, and I was thankful that I was to be spared this problem.

During the weeks that we waited for the arrival of the family, things began to go quite well. Mariska turned out to be an excellent, if somewhat limited and temperamental cook. The day that she elected to make strudel was almost as stressful as were Madame's pre-performance hours during the opera season. The poundings and thumpings from the kitchen for once

evoked no protest because they presaged something good to eat, and when more space was needed in which to hang up the dough, the cook was given the run of the living room and Madame went fishing. Every day we had soup garnished with those big dumplings which I had so much enjoyed in Vienna, and under Mariska's hand, tough old Maine fowls found themselves rendered tender and delicious, and pink as the sunset with paprika.

When the weather settled a bit, Madame splashed every morning in the icy lake, laughing merrily at my reluctance to join her. We also acquired a rowboat which she took out for exercise every day, no matter how strong the wind, reveling in the elastic pull of her muscles. When she was well away from shore, she would fill her lungs and shout a "*Ho-jo-to-ho, Hei-ha!*" that brought the neighboring campers rushing down to the end of their docks to see if there had been an accident.

In the early twilight when all was still, we would troll for fish, and in the brief evenings before the fire I would read detective stories aloud; or if the mood happened to be more festive, I would wind up the phonograph which the Columbia Company had sent to us, and Madame and Mariska would put on high boots and dance a czardas with snapping fingers and vigorous stampings which put a dangerous strain on the flimsy floor boards.

This pleasing state of affairs made it a little easier for me to tear myself away, so when Rachel came I wisely departed while all was still rose color. At home I found that I did not know what on earth to do with my sudden leisure and I tossed, bored and restless, on the flowery bed of ease which my mother had so lovingly prepared for me.



The news from Harrison came through to me in short notes from Rachel and a few long and rather pessimistic discourses from Madame's pen on the beauties of nature and the fallibility of man—and woman. I was prepared to hear at any

moment that Mariska had fled, but my plot had evidently succeeded for she did not learn enough English words that summer to give her the confidence needed for escape. She was still on hand, although homesick and glum, when I returned in late August. Rachel and Malcolm had already gone back to Minneapolis for the opening of school so I had to pick up the thread of events from Papa Bristol.

I found him disturbed and uneasy over something that had been going on since midsummer, and was now reaching a crisis. When he told me, I was not surprised and supposed that I really ought to have warned him. The situation was one with which I was already quite familiar, for I had met it on all our travels. Olive Fremstad had two all-consuming ambitions; the first of these concerned, of course, her art, but the other was simpler and deeper—she wanted to own a piece of land. Wherever we went, even including Karlstein, she walked the streets and climbed the hills and stalked the forests looking for a home of her own. She was the despair of real estate agents the world over because she seemed at first such a fine prospect and yet, at the final moment would always slip away, afraid to trust either the agents or the dictates of her own heart. Had it not been for this eleventh-hour caution, she would have long since been the owner of a villa in Italy, a small château in France, a chalet in Switzerland, a farm in Bohemia, several suburban estates around Munich and Berlin, and at the very least, a building lot in every American city that she visited on tour.

Now, of course, she had immediately become involved here in Maine. So much was to be expected, but this time the matter had gone rather further than usual and was complicated by the fact that she had all but contracted to buy two places, being unable to choose between them. This uncertainty, and the pressure put upon her by the various agents and owners, had upset her and she had become unreasonably suspicious of the whole thing. When I arrived she could think or talk of nothing else, and I had scarcely removed my hat before I was informed that the little village of Harrison was a seething nest of intrigue

against her, and that she must get out at once. Then she wrung her hands and invited the Deity to witness her disappointment, and said how sick she was of being a wandering minstrel and how tragic it all was that at last having found a home, she was being turned away by unscrupulous people who sought to take advantage of her.

This was almost too much for me, but I went with her that very afternoon to see the places she thought that she had bought, disliked them both heartily, and urged her to forget any deposit she might have made. She would, I insisted, be well out of it at any cost, for Harrison was already host to an encroaching number of boys' and girls' camps which I knew would have Madame demented in no time should she find herself neighbor to one. As for the "unscrupulous"—it was my experience that few people ever tried to take advantage of Olive Fremstad unless she accused them of doing so; but it was equally true that, once she had voiced such suspicions, a compulsion to justify them seemed to develop. Of course she labored under the disadvantage of her fame, and to native-born and summer guests alike she was always the foreigner—the queer one.

She was enormously relieved when I thus settled the question for her so promptly and simply, but just the same, she continued to grieve a little for her lost paradise. When she chanced upon an old friend in the market one day, who had a camp on the smaller, more picturesque and secluded Highland Lake in nearby Bridgton, she flouted my advice and, before we went back to the city, actually bought and paid for a pretty, rustic cabin in a cove near the head of the lake, an environ thus far uncluttered by other human habitation. This purchase eventually affected her whole scheme of life, although for a while it seemed incidental. I had to admit the charm of the location and frankly fell in love with the tidy little house (which was one day to be my own as a reward for five years' service), but I saw in it a menace to future sojourns in Europe and gave up such visions grudgingly. I was a better prophet than I realized.



When the deed was signed and Madame had accustomed herself to the bliss of lording it over something with trees and grass on it, there followed two weeks of consultation with local carpenters, of reading blueprints, trailing surveyors, and all the other intoxications incident to first ownership of property. Although electricity was out of the question, a bathroom was not, and this brought up the problem of the water supply. To pump water from the lake meant a noisy engine and a man to run it; far better, advised the contractor, to find a spring in the woods and let the water run by gravity to the house.

"Find a spring?" said Madame, already fascinated. "But how?"

"Oh, we'll just get Luther to come over and spot it for you. Luther's a crackerjack dowser—never fails!"

Dowser was a new word to Madame, but she had heard vaguely of divining rods and witch-hazel, and immediately conceived of Luther as a sort of rustic Klingsor, whose conjuring she awaited with proper awe. He arrived—not in a peal of operatic thunder, but in an almost equally noisy Model T Ford. He reeked of ancient pipe smoke rather than brimstone; a wrinkled little man with the brightest blue eyes I have ever seen, terse of speech and businesslike in manner.

"I'll just cut me a hazel fork and git right on the jawb," he said. "Whereabout was you figuring to have your watter?"

Madame made a gesture of mock deference and met his eye with challenge in her own. "You tell me!" she said.

"Handy to have it run down, Lute, if we can," said the contractor. "S'pose you try up back."

Luther drew a large case knife and examined the underbrush while we stood around him with bated breath. Presently he found what he sought, cut a forked twig like a large wishbone, stripped the leaves from it, and balanced it tentatively in his hands. It was supple and springy. "O.K.," he said, "let's go!"

First he went over the terrain without benefit of witchcraft, poking with a toe at moss and rock, rejecting one site after another. At last he seemed satisfied and glanced up brightly at his employer. "Looks to be a likely spot, but its kind of far and pipe

costs a sight of money these days. We'll just follow along down and see how she runs, O.K.?"

"O.K.," said Madame Fremstad for the first time in her life. "What are you waiting for?"

Luther balanced the stick in both his hands, by the tips of the prongs. The center part which connected them was about six inches long and he held it level and pointing, his arms outstretched before him and his bright blue gaze steady, as he walked slowly and carefully, in an ever-widening circle. We followed, stalking him like cats after a mouse. Nothing happened. Luther spat. "Dang," he said, "have to go back higher up!"

Obediently we mounted the slope behind him, and just where it began to level off, he stopped, seemed to do a sort of dance step, then braced his feet apart. "Got her!" he cried triumphantly. "Lookit here!"

The contractor offered Madame a hand, and in a moment we were all gathered around the performer, struggling to believe our eyes. Luther stood firm now, his shoulder muscles tense, his arms rigid, while the forked rod was bending down, as if pulled toward the earth by an invisible chain. Nonsense, I thought, he just makes it do that! But I looked over at Madame and saw that she believed. Her cheeks were pink and her eyebrows were climbing as they always did in the throes of strong feeling. "Dig!" she commanded.

In no time at all the contractor's boys with their picks and shovels had uncovered a bubbling spring on a ledge some four feet below the accumulation of moss and forest mold. Luther, however, was not satisfied. "Ought to be nearer home," he complained, and started walking along the ledge in a downward curve. He cut himself a new rod and gave it his full attention, but it lay limp in his palms. "Sorry, ma'am," he said finally. "Nothing doin'."

Something meanwhile was happening to Madame, familiar yet unfamiliar. Where, I thought, had I seen that eerie light in her eye, that dedicated, breathless look? But of course—the dressing room, the mystic interval just before she went out on

the stage! "Give it to me!" she commanded in Isolde tones.

Luther placed the delicate twig-ends in her palms and adjusted the height and direction, giving her shoulder a little push. "That's the ticket, ma'am. Watch it now!" He grinned and spat and winked slyly at the rest of us. But in another moment the grin was wiped from every face by a cry from Madame, who was by now several yards below us. "*Du Allmächtiger*," she screamed, "help me!"

We rushed to her side, to behold her with set teeth and staring eyes clinging like grim death to her hazel rod which was bending and waving toward the ground as if alive. I noticed that the knuckles of her hands were white with the tension of her grip and that she shook from shoulder to wrist. When Luther took the dowsing rod from her grasp the green bark was hanging in strips from the ends which she had held, as if the stick had tried to twist itself loose. It was a moment of supreme triumph, developing even more excitement when the diggers found a vein of water which would have supplied the needs of a dozen camps. The next day I went over and cut myself several beautiful hazel forks and tried them all, even standing directly over Luther's and Madame's discoveries, but the wretched twigs lay supine in my hands and refused to budge. I came back crest-fallen, but Madame laughed. "I could have told you, Tinka. You are not the type!"

When, a few seasons later, she built her beautiful place called Nawandyn in the pine woods a mile or so away, it was she who, as a matter of course, found her own never-failing spring.

## Chapter 19

MY SECOND SEASON as Olive Fremstad's buffer was, in many ways, the best of her professional career; certainly it was the busiest. She sang thirty-six performances of opera, gave fif-

teen concerts, and fulfilled a supplementary engagement at the Munich Wagner Festival, canceling nothing. This happy consummation was not credited to my ministrations this time, but to the invigorating air of the Maine woods and the comparative calm—at least for her—of camp life. She submitted to the usual interviews before the season, but they were unusual in substance. Where formerly she had extolled the advantages of study abroad, the inspiration of art in the Old World, she now spoke of the fascinations of wood-chopping, of fishing for one's dinner, and, of course, of dowsing. Her concert manager, who had his plans laid for a transcontinental tour for her someday, was delighted at this homespun turn her ideas had taken and encouraged her to expatiate at length on these topics. Judging by my own tastes, I believe that the general public would prefer something more glamorous, but as it turned out, he was right, even if several decades ahead of his time.

Soon the aura of wood smoke and the easy ways of camp vanished as if they had never been, and we plunged into the orthodox routine of operatic life, Madame returning with scarcely a jolt to prima-donnahood. The matter of a wardrobe for the season bothered her for a time, but presently she made her second discovery of America and found that handsome gowns and hats were to be had right on Fifth Avenue. For these she paid outrageous sums—*prix d'artiste* in New York working, it seemed to me, in reverse. But she never murmured. This emphasized an odd characteristic of hers which always baffled me: although she was thrifty to the point where pennies were sometimes pinched, dollars rarely were. The more astronomical a bill, the less fuss she made about paying it—provided it was rendered for goods or services that she considered first class. Later in her life, when doctors and surgeons became important, she was often shocked, but never grumbled, at the size of their fees. I believe that she derived some sort of oblique satisfaction from her ability to meet such charges—remembering her harried youth when there was not always the price of a bottle of cough medicine in her pocket.

For me life was rather different this year. There were no longer the distractions of moving to and settling new apartments, and although Mariska left us the instant she set foot on the polyglot pavement of New York, and the processions to and from the employment agencies were resumed in all their dreary regularity, I had by this time acquired a certain technique and was able to cope with such problems more deftly. We had a little more social life as well—or perhaps I just had more time to notice it.

Madame was very considerate of me in this respect; she liked to include me in most of her plans, often to the confounding of others involved. She thought it enormously comic to refer to me as her “mother.” Once she accepted an invitation to a large and formal dinner at the home of Mrs. Charles Ditson on condition that she might bring her mother with her. Mrs. Ditson, although probably visualizing an elderly Swedish matriarch who might prove to be a conversational hazard, was left no choice but a courteous, “Why, of course, dear Olive!” Imagine her dismay when the guest of honor appeared in all her splendor, trailed by a gawky young girl with braided hair, in a modest frock of brown velveteen! I must say that this clever hostess recovered rapidly from the shock and turned the farcical situation into an icebreaker for her party. I had a *succès fou*, which I think was devised primarily to please Madame, but thereafter I attended no more dinner parties in the role of parent or other relative. I did accompany Madame to various other functions, however, and I well remember a certain occasion when Miss Kitty Cheatham, the *diseuse*, a great Fremstad fan, sent her a box for one of her matinee recitals. We duly attended and my own mother was asked by Madame to sit with us. Afterward we went with other guests to congratulate Miss Cheatham in the greenroom and I was introduced, in the usual spirit of mischief, as Fremstad’s mother. The sprightly *diseuse*, in her incredible Bopeep costume, turned sweetly to my parent. “And that makes *you* Olive’s *grandmother*, doesn’t it?” So Madame called Mother “Grandma” for a while, and the rift between them widened.

I suppose a slight rift was natural under the circumstances, but it raised problems, now that my family was installed only a few blocks from us down the street. Madame was very punctilious and constantly prated of one's duty toward parents, but her enthusiasm waned whenever I performed this duty. No matter how calm the scene before I ventured forth to spend an evening in the home circle, there would be tempest and lightning in the apartment on my return. No human being could have invented, in such brief hours, the multiplicity of problems and sheer disasters which inevitably rose up and smote the household during my absence, so it must have been the perversity of fate—aided ever so little, perhaps, by a sly shove from Madame. In any event, although devoted to my family, I heartily wished them back in Vermont on more occasions than one. We would all have been happier.

I must say that both my parents did their best to understand this strange and gifted individual whose life their child was living so strenuously. As soon as they were settled in their new quarters we were invited to a meal. Mother had done herself proud and we had a feast in the best New England tradition. Madame ate her way enthusiastically through the menu, making only one comment. This concerned the string beans. These would seem to be an inoffensive vegetable, but after consuming a generous helping, Madame refused a second, adding graciously, "Someday you must let me come and show you how to cook these properly!"

"She meant it so well," I pleaded later with my offended parent. "She really thought it would be a kindness!"

"Pooh!" said Mother. "And what about this?" She showed me a graceful little note of thanks she had received from Madame which concluded with some such astonishing words as these:

I really enjoyed the meal so much that I should like to come often, but would not wish to impose upon your hospitality. Could you not place a little dish near the door so that, on leaving, I could put there what I thought the dinner was worth, without embarrassing you? . . .

Mother met with another defeat later that same season. Worried a little about the aridity of my love life, she adopted the practice of inviting eligible young men on such evenings as she could be sure of my company at the home table. One of these attached himself to me with some show of enthusiasm, eventually attended the opera on a Fremstad night, and at my suggestion, came behind the scenes to greet Madame. She was singing Sieglinde and was at her best. I knew that he would be impressed, but I feared—as well I might—the shock to him of meeting wig and make-up at such close range. Obviously shaken, he pulled himself together with a mighty effort and uttered what he conceived to be a compliment. “Madame Fremstad,” he stammered, “I used to be so confused by Wagner, but tonight I really believe that I understand it all!”

“Isn’t that nice,” said the diva cordially, “you are more fortunate than I who have given my whole life to the study and still know so little!”

Nothing I could ever say or do won that young man back. “What’s the matter with you, Tinka?” Madame asked one day. “He was such a handsome fellow! In your place I would certainly have set my cap!”



Christmas presented, every year, the gravest obstacle to peace and good will. In the Watkins family the festival had always been bright and beautiful, a time of reunion, of self-forgetfulness in the joy of giving to others. Not so in the Fremstad citadel, where it was a season of woe, of distrust, of withdrawal from any sort of merrymaking. Somehow, in the first winter’s hurly-burly of moving and illness and missed performances, I had lived this down, but now I was determined to have Christmas with all the fixings: I would trust to the odors of spruce, wax candles, and gingerbread, to overcome the threatened melancholy. I had made and gaily wrapped presents for Madame, for the maids, and even for Mimi. I had also bought and secreted a small tree and trimmings and, the German back-

ground in mind, had laid in piles of *Lebkuchen*, raisins, and marzipan.

Two days before the holiday Madame looked me squarely in the eye and announced: "Tinka, I know what you are up to. Now listen to me! I want no Christmas—I hate the day! If you dare to bring a tree in here I will throw it *and you* straight out of the window!"

In spite of this dire threat, which I more than half believed, I went ahead with my plans. I had unshakable faith in the magic of Christmas even though I knew well that Fremstad dedicated the day to misery in memory of the scared, friendless girl who arrived alone in New York one Christmas Eve more than twenty years before and spent the festival shivering and sobbing, dinnerless, in a drab boardinghouse bedroom. That she eventually found work—and friends too—in Papa Bristol's studio; that before long she was soloist in St. Patrick's Cathedral; that in no time at all she was making concert tours, going to Europe, becoming an opera singer; and that she eventually returned in triumph, her hands full of honors, to sit on top of the gilded ladder in that very city where she had once been cold, hungry, and lonesome at Christmastide—all this was forgotten when the pitiful anniversary came around each year. She kept a grim wake over these memories and rejected all temptation to erase them from her heart.

This particular Christmas Eve she had an afternoon rehearsal which gave me time to set up and trim the tree, to put a red bow on Mimi, and to lay out the presents. From the kitchen came delicious smells of baking cookies, and a high tea was on the table by the time Madame was due. When I heard the elevator door, I lighted the tree, switched on a phonograph record of "Holy Night," and waited. Not only did my own plan work, but a twin miracle had already taken place. Fremstad had her arms mysteriously full of bundles, and presently bade me call Mimi from the bedroom where there had been a great rustling of tissue paper. At first no dog appeared, but hearty laughter greeted my whistle and in another minute there was Mimi, in



a harness of red string, struggling to drag a beautiful pigskin suitcase through the hall to my feet. Inside it were all sorts of surprises, from violet-scented toilet water, to a charming little change-purse of gold mesh, fat with those beautiful yellow coins which no one remembers any more.

After supper the maids came in and I put out the electric bulbs on the tree and lighted the real tapers. Then Madame went to the piano and sang "O Tannenbaum," and when I did not cry, scolded me heartily for having no sentiment. "Don't you know, Tinka, that when you look up at a lighted Christmas tree, tears must trickle down your cheeks?"

The maids, both homesick for the old country, promptly obliged her, and her own voice choked on the second verse, and we had a lovely time. I was allowed to go to my family next day for a celebration. *Die Walküre* was scheduled for the 26th, and Madame Fremstad, most opportunely, wished to practice undisturbed all the afternoon.



In the professional aspect of our life, I never had to face the dulling effect of routine. It was in the nature of this work that, no matter how familiar each repetition of emergencies and alarms became, there was small danger of becoming indifferent. Olive Fremstad had told me on that first afternoon in her Ansonia parlor, "No one around me is ever bored," and no truer words could be spoken. I never had a moment for woolgathering at the theater, but if I found myself becoming too casual or relaxed about my modest part in the proceedings, I would go out to the wings and stand there watching Fremstad. Every performance was for her either a Golgotha or a sacrament; she never slighted a note or a gesture, never walked through any part, no matter whether it appealed to her or not. I did not hear her Santuzza, but I know very well what Henry Krehbiel felt when he wrote, after her performance in *Cavalleria Rusticana* at the New Theater: "The little opera positively groaned under the weight of her interpretation."

The Christmas-week Sieglinde was one of those performances which I marked in my day-book with a red star. The role had been out of the Fremstad repertoire for the two previous seasons during which she experimented with Brünnhilde in the same opera. But public sentiment was insistent; her Sieglinde was as dear and as irreplaceable to her audience as her Venus. Any other singer in the part was an interloper. Had it been possible to sing both roles in the same performance (the stunt she had once suggested for Venus and Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*) she would have been delighted, for she loved them equally. It was as Sieglinde, however, that she made her Metropolitan debut on November 25, 1903, with Felix Mottl conducting. Now, more than nine years later, this lovely, human daughter of Wotan had become part of her bone and flesh.

She gave to the frightened wife of Hunding, the rapturous bride of Siegmund, a tender, womanly quality which touched the heart. I always loved to watch her set the table in Act I, the loaf of bread tucked under her arm like any *Hausfrau*; and I could never see without a smile, the wifely way in which she took from Hunding his spear and shield and hung them in the primitive equivalent of the hall closet. When she and the two men sat down to their meal I waited impatiently for that dream-like moment when the orchestra confides, on the Walhalla motif, the secret parentage of the enamored brother and sister. Fremstad's Sieglinde here leaned gently back and closed her eyes, as if her whole being concentrated upon some mysterious stirring deep within her heart. Then, as the motif rolled majestically on to its end she lifted her head, alert, eyes shining, as if a god had touched her lightly in passing. No other Sieglinde I have ever seen—and there have been many—has conveyed to an audience such vibrant and poetic imagery. Later, in her dialogue with Siegmund, there came another such breathless moment as she listened inwardly to echoes of a voice half recalled from a happier past. As for her account of her wedding with Hunding—the wonderful *Die Männer Sippe sass hier im Saal*—the audience always hung upon her words

with such concentration that she might have been telling them the tale personally for the first time.

We could go home early on Sieglinde nights, but Fremstad came down out of the clouds slowly, and I knew that this role had gone deep into her heart and that she freed herself with difficulty from its spell. How different was the reaction of Maria Jeritza, another very beautiful and exciting Sieglinde, whom I once discovered entertaining Mr. Gatti and other visitors in her dressing room between the acts of *Walküre* by turning somersaults in full costume and make-up—gracefully, to be sure, but rather out of vein!



Olive Fremstad had a new role that season, really a ridiculous one for her, and the outcome of a brief passage at arms between her and Mr. Gatti. She had been complaining that her work was too exacting, that her current repertoire afforded her insufficient relief from the heroic, voice-shattering Wagnerian roles. So Gatti gave her, in appeasement, the short and vapid part of Giulietta in his revival of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. It was a super-production, cast with a lavish hand. Frieda Hempel was the doll Olympia, and Lucrezia Bori the sad Antonia, but the Venetian courtesan, Giulietta, never really belonged to Olive Fremstad. She was artistically and vocally too big for the part—one might as well have asked the Winged Victory of Samothrace to dance the tango. The public, while enjoying such largesse, eventually cried out upon its wastefulness, and after three performances, the part was given into lesser and more suitable hands. Fremstad did sing a fourth Giulietta, however, and under rather startling circumstances.

On the 12th of March that year, two days after she had sung a Tosca and two days before she was scheduled for a *Walküre* Brünnhilde, I felt that I might safely plan to dine that night with my family. We had a fine big dinner, a gay and carefree hour. Mother had managed to lure back once more the young man who had sustained such humiliation in the dressing room

a few weeks earlier. The events of this particular evening were, however, to prove too much even for his forgiving nature. While our plates were being changed for dessert the telephone rang and the maid came in hastily with a rather frightened look, to say that it was for me. I got up with a slight premonitory groan, went into the hall, took up the receiver and, as far as anyone at the table could tell, vanished completely. I never came back into the room to explain, nor did I even stop for my hat and coat, but, oblivious of the stares of passers-by, ran out into the cold March streets just as I was and grabbed a taxi which I urged forward like a racehorse. It had been Madame's voice on the telephone and what she had said—in surprisingly calm tones—was, "Come at once, Tinka, I'm singing tonight—in forty minutes!"

"Good Heavens!" I screamed. "What?"

"Never mind, just come!"

It was inconceivable to me that such a crisis could be dealt with competently without my guiding hand, but when I arrived, breathless, at the apartment, everything was under control. The wig had been taken out of curl papers, the costume and make-up packed, the car ordered, and Fremstad, already swathed in white veil and shawl, was at the piano trying her voice.

"Giulietta!" she hissed. "Duchène has had an accident. Come on!"

The car was announced and we drove to the theater in pregnant but not unamiable silence. Fremstad was duly transformed to Giulietta with no time for the usual agonies and incantations; and in the entr'acte, shortly after our arrival, Mr. William Guard, publicity director of the company, stepped before the golden curtains and announced to a surprised but delighted public that Olive Fremstad had graciously consented to sing in place of the suddenly "indisposed" Marie Duchène. He added later, for the benefit of the morning papers, "Madame Fremstad's act was a particularly fine one; a singer of her standing is not accustomed to make substitutions at the last moment, espe-

cially not to replace a lesser member of the company. But she realized at once that it was too late to change the opera and but for her the house would have to be closed. She did not hesitate a moment."

I heard more details from Madame, who was thoroughly pleased with herself; principally, I think, because she had discovered that it was not absolutely necessary to have spiritual convulsions before a performance. "What an idiot I have been, Tinka!" she said. "I have learned my lesson at last!"

This was idle boasting, for two nights later, facing Brünnhilde, the old anguish again assailed her. She had, however, gained some valuable ground with Gatti. It had not been easy for him to appeal to one of his most volatile artists to save the day. On the telephone he had approached the matter cagily.

"I don't suppose you would like to do us a favor, *cara?*"

"Why do you put it that way, Signor Gatti?" she parried, on her guard.

"Simply because you have the reputation of being difficult. I approach anyone as arbitrary as yourself only *in extremis*. But here is the point: Duchène has got herself ridiculously imprisoned in her hotel elevator which is stuck between floors. We have no other Giulietta in town but you, and the opera is already on. I thought perhaps you might consider favorably an extra *cachet?*"

His strategy worked like a charm. "Gatti, you amaze and offend me! Just to prove to you how wrong you are, I will be at the theater in half an hour. You may not even have to hold the curtain. As for an extra *cachet*, you underestimate my loyalty—I am glad to do it out of sheer good will. *Basta!*"



There were seven more major performances, among them a *Parsifal* in New York and a single *Walküre* in St. Louis, before we were free to run up to Maine and see how things were progressing at the Bridgton camp, which had been named "Little Walhalla."

We stayed there in the woods for six wonderful weeks, entertaining beside the clouds of black flies and mosquitoes, flocks of wild ducks, loons, innumerable deer, chipmunks, and skunks, several of Madame's admirers and friends from New York. None of these stayed very long; I think that the chill morning swims, the somewhat inadequate plumbing, the constant diet of fish, combined to put them off. This was not the Fremstad they liked best. Madame saw each one depart with ill-concealed relief. "Social life—pooh!" she exclaimed. "Now, *Gott sei Dank*, I can get down to business!"

The last days at Little Walhalla echoed with the heavenly strains of "Brünnhilde's Awakening," from *Siegfried*, the role which seemed to trouble her most in the repertoire she was preparing for Germany. She was glad to take refuge again in the familiar fortress of hard work, for she had had a number of skirmishes with local residents which had upset and estranged her. The baffling thing about such encounters was that she approached these new friends with the warmest good will and never could understand how the ensuing antagonism was created. To me it was all too plain. A single anecdote is sufficient to illustrate the point.

We wandered up one day to the farmhouse on the hill which supplied us with eggs, milk, and ice, and found a meeting of the Ladies' Sewing Circle in full swing in the parlor, where home-made cake and ice cream were about to be served. The hostess pressed generous samplings of these upon us and we sat in the sun on the porch and consumed them with relish. Afterwards, to show her appreciation and friendliness, Madame went in to meet the ladies, sat herself down at the melodion, and sang "Comin' through the Rye," "Auld Lang Syne," and a little Scandinavian folksong which was always her favorite encore, "Å Janta à Ja."

There was a rustle of stiff and uneasy applause. The voice was unlike any that had yet been heard in those parts, where radio and good phonographs would not penetrate for years to come—and the subtleties of an art which endowed even the

simplest things with emotion and drama bewildered the listeners. They felt, however, that courtesy demanded some display of further interest. When Madame returned to the kitchen to conclude whatever errand had originally brought us there, one of the ladies—evidently the “card” of the group—thrust her head and a wagging forefinger around the door and said, “Before you go, mind you, we want some more of that singing!”

Olive Fremstad looked at the speaker with coldly widening eyes. To her this seemed the most incredible presumption, nothing more. Drawing herself to her full Wagnerian height, she replied, “Woman, have you any idea what you ask?”

Turning on her heel she stalked out, followed by me, struggling as usual against my temptation to giggle. “Stoking-bottles . . . pearls before you-know-what!” she thundered as we swept down the path, and of course every one of those ladies heard her.

“Tinka,” she complained, “there you have it! Hopeless! How can I ever reach these people, get to know them?”

“It takes time—years and years. I’m a Yankee too and I can see their side. They simply have to get used to you, you are—well—so different!”

“Thank God for that!” said Madame.

“Now, Livan . . .” I began, but my voice trailed into silence as I met her hostile glare.

“If you are so *sympatisch*, Tinka, why don’t you go back and sit with them? You can have a wonderful time explaining me to them! *Good—by!*” This quite crushed me, as was intended, but I managed to whisper, “Yes, Livan, I guess you’re right—it’s hopeless!”

Not entirely so, as the course of time would prove. When Olive Fremstad built Nawandyn and became a familiar figure about the village year after year, she made many real friends there. Even those who never knew her well agreed that “the Madam’s odd ways don’t mean a thing!” and they were proud of her and the renown which she brought to their community.

## Chapter 20

WE SAILED for Europe on the *SS George Washington* early in July, and it was a very different voyage from the two I remembered. The weather was superb, the sea like a pond; a full moon lighted the evenings, and the whole ship burgeoned with summertime gaiety. Eventually this infected Madame and she deserted her cabin for the sun deck where, dressed all in purest white, she held a continual levee, for it was a holiday ship and there were many young people aboard who, true to their era, considered an opera singer a figure of dazzling glamour.

Fremstad, the only celebrity on the passenger list, never had a better time. Of course she protested as usual, that the life of a recluse was more to her taste, but for those few days she made no visible struggle and was rarely seen alone. I was satisfied to be a part of what I considered the proper retinue of a famous singer en route to star in the Wagner Festival in Munich, and was glad we had Ulrike the maid, and Mimi along, rejoicing greatly at the number of kodaks which were aimed in our direction. It was the greatest delight to me to hear the orchestra break into Fremstad's music when she entered the lounge at tea hour and to sample the elaborate dishes which the chef invented and named in her honor at almost every meal. In my opinion this was all exactly as it should be.

When Madame declined to sing at the ship's concert, general disappointment was tempered by an added appreciation of her importance—as I believe she knew it would be. In any event, the luster of this most propitious voyage continued to shine upon us all the way to Paris. People who humbly feared that they might have secured better compartments or hotel suites than hers hastened to lay them at her feet. Thus, having aimed at the Continental, we found ourselves installed at the Crillon



in a perfect bower of roses. Whenever Madame called a taxi, a private limousine would roll up and open its doors to her; when she took the air, doormen bowed low and passers-by, mystified but impressed, doffed their hats. On rainy days I half expected to see coats flung on the pavement in her path. We were invited to the opera and the theater in the best-located loges; we lunched at Foyot's and dined in the Bois. It was dreamlike; I could not believe that this was the same Paris where it had formerly pleased Madame most to eat in obscure *boîtes* and spend her days fighting to the death with modistes and fitters. She did decide, however, that the Crillon was no place for Mimi and Ulrike, and to the latter's frantic delight, shipped them both off to the maid's home near Munich to await our arrival.

Presently, as I might have known, the whole thing began to pall, and Madame whispered to me slyly one morning, "Come on, Tinka, let us sneak away to München tomorrow. Go yourself—so the concierge won't look down his nose—and get us *deuxième classe* tickets."

"*Deuxième classe*? Do you think that you will be comfortable for so long a journey?"

"No, I don't," said Fremstad, "but after all this luxury it will be a wholesome change. So don't argue!"

It was not as wholesome as all that, but very grimy and disagreeable, for we had to share the compartment with a French family possessed of large appetites and weak stomachs and the hours in their company were a torment. I was the more delighted when, arrived in Munich, our debts to discipline were considered paid and we drove directly to the Hotel Marienbad, washing away the dust of travel in a princely bathroom, part of that once-charming hostelry's most charming suite.

But the morning brought disillusionment; this was not to be our headquarters for long. Shortly after breakfast the Loomis Taylors arrived to take us apartment hunting. Loomis was the young composer-*répétiteur* who, at the Metropolitan, had told me one night at a performance of *Tristan*, that he considered it

an honor to live in the same *century* with Olive Fremstad. Now he had taken unto himself a wife and they were here in Munich for the honeymoon and he, as always, was at Madame's service. The thought of housekeeping again so soon dashed my spirits. Rike could be counted on to stick with us for the sake of being near the rural postman to whom she was engaged, but nevertheless, I knew what catering to operatic caprices in a foreign city would mean and I shuddered with foreboding. I went with the Taylors, leaving Madame to recover from the journey and, in her Paris finery, to receive with due ceremony the *Intendant* of the opera, Herr Ritter von Possart, and the conductor, Bruno Walter.

Almost at once we found a charming place on the Ohmstrasse, an apartment belonging to absent Americans who had had the sense to furnish it with Bavarian antiques. It smelled of fruitwood and beeswax, contained a fine Bechstein piano, was sunny and quiet and near the Englischer Garten. When Madame saw it she was so charmed that she insisted on moving in that very evening although neither gas nor electricity had been turned on, and Rike could not possibly arrive before the next afternoon.

There followed a night so painful that I still wince in remembrance. It was useless to try to unpack in the dark and we stubbed toes and bruised elbows wherever we moved about the unfamiliar rooms. So we went to bed about eight o'clock because there was nothing else to do. I had no sooner sunk into uneasy slumbers than a hoarse shout from Madame brought me skipping and slipping over the parquet to her door. I found her groaning and tossing in agony.

"Tinka, I am poisoned. . . . München was never safe for me! *Who* could it be this time?"

"The sausages," I said promptly, "too many *Bratwürstchen* at lunch!"

"Don't lecture me. Get me hot water at once!"

This simple article was of course unobtainable. No heat. And

no telephone by which to summon a doctor or other help. What to do?

"Hot water . . . hurry!" moaned Madame.

I groped in the hall for a coat, and not stopping for shoes or stockings, dashed out into the public corridor and down the matting-covered stairs. The first doorbell which I rang produced no results, but the second, after a long wait, aroused some shuffling within. Presently a small peephole in the panel was opened and a cold, disembodied gray eye appraised me. "*Weg!*" said a muffled voice in no uncertain tone.

"*Aber, bitte, bittel!*" I pleaded, and paused to dredge up some further bit of vocabulary to meet the crisis. But the delay was fatal. "*Weg, weg!*" snarled the voice again, and the peephole clicked firmly shut.

In desperation I turned to the door behind me, not having observed that neighborly curiosity was already in evidence there. Now a bolt slid back and a broad, kindly face under a crown of hair curlers peered anxiously at me. "*Schwein!*" said a querulous voice, the head nodding toward the other door. Then, to me, "*Nun, armes Fräulein, was wünschen Sie?*"

I got not only the hot water but a candle as well, and the good soul came upstairs with me and sat beside the bed of my sufferer until recovery was well established. So there were kind hearts in Munich after all!

Having imagined the entire *Festspiel* collapsing around our heads, it was a relief next morning to find Madame not much the worse for her experience. From the corner grocery shop I telephoned the good Taylors and they had a bevy of doctors and nurses at the apartment within the hour, and gas and electricity went on as if by magic. Great stiff bouquets of flowers kept arriving all day, and I hoped that the *Schwein* who lived beneath us was suitably impressed.

Summoned by a telegram, Ulrike and Mimi appeared in late afternoon, the trained nurse was speeded on her way, and all the baggage was brought from the station. Exhausted though

I was, I spread the contents of the "homelike trunk" around the place before I went to bed that night. I had great confidence in its powers and, sure enough, when Rike brought in breakfast on a tray next morning, Madame smiled and said we might have been living there for a month. I looked out at the clean, balcony-hung street below, full of market-bound *Hausfrauen* and sighed contentedly. Now I am going to see the real Munich at last! I thought with rash optimism.

What I saw, at least for a while, was little else than the interior of the Prinzregenten Theater and a shady corner of the Englischer Garten. After lunch, or a morning rehearsal, Madame liked to sit, well-disguised, on a bench and do nothing—or more accurately, to dream of her youth in this romantic old city. She talked very little, but for some reason both Mimi and I had to be there. At four o'clock we would go over to the tea garden beside a hideous Chinese pagoda, sip coffee in glasses at a dusty iron table and nibble sticky, pinwheel buns called snails. These were never very good and there was usually some kind of altercation with the waiter. I wondered why this was any fun, and much preferred rehearsals.

The first of these had been a near catastrophe. The opera was *Tristan* and, contrary to general practice, there were a number of spectators present, attracted by the renown of this great Wagnerian who was once their Carmen. Fremstad, looking regal and beautiful, walked on the stage, took one or two of her enormous strides and fell flat on her nose. Not a graceful fall, certainly not an antic to convey dignity and importance. I almost burst into tears at this dreadful sight and fought my way backstage against strong resistance, for in this theater I was not allowed the freedom I enjoyed at the Metropolitan. I found Madame seated on a bit of scenery with every conductor, sub-conductor, director and singer in the place standing around her, all talking at once. The German language crashed against my ears fortissimo, ringing every change of shock, indignation, apology, and sympathy. Madame said nothing, but pounded her clenched fist up and down gently against her knee and shook

her head, her eyes dark and troubled. When she saw me she reached out a shaking hand. "Tinka, it is an ill omen. . . . I will fail here as Isolde!"

As long as I live I shall never cease to be grateful to Madame Charles Cahier, who was singing the Brangäne and who now intervened. "Nonsense, Fremstad," she said in her crisp, practical tones, "have you never heard of William the Conqueror? When he invaded England, you know, he tripped and fell on the shore as he disembarked. But he was a fast thinker. He grabbed two handfuls of English soil and said 'Thus do I grasp this land!' Now let me see *your* palms!" Sure enough, Isolde's hands were black with the stage dust of Munich. "Well—so what are *you* worried about?"

A slow smile widened the tragic lips; the eyebrows descended. "Cahier, you are wonderful!" said Fremstad.

Madame Cahier looked at her watch. It was noon. "Moreover," she continued, "what you need now is a good beefsteak!" In no time at all a recess in the rehearsal was called, and we went down to the city in company with Rosie, Professor Fuchs, the Cahiers, and several others, and in a very elegant restaurant ate the biggest meal I have ever seen. Madame returned to the theater in fine fettle and, although the rehearsal went on until dusk, no one murmured. The little knots of spectators in the house applauded often and stayed until the end. Success was in the air!

Several things were strange to me in this German theater, and some were rather alarming. In the first place, it was only by special dispensation that I was allowed in the dressing room, and once there, access to the auditorium was forbidden. My view of the proceedings on the stage was blocked in every *coulisse* by the tallest, broadest firemen who ever wore uniform and my most pitiful pleadings could not budge one of them a single inch. I ran here and there, up and down like a frightened rabbit, trying at once to see and yet remain unseen, and getting

generally underfoot. Had it not been for my awkward German and brash American ways, I would without any doubt have been popped into jail and never heard of more.

But my chief terror was that I might chance to meet face to face the royal prince, Ludwig Ferdinand, the grandson of King Ludwig I of Bavaria. He was a practicing physician in Munich, whose appointment book read like the *Almanach de Gotha*, but who was more interested in the poor, and consequently much beloved. He was also an accomplished violinist and, during *Festspiel* time, amused himself by playing in the orchestra at the Prinzregenten. Hence he was often seen about the corridors of the house and I had been strictly admonished by Madame that I must curtsy to the floor before him if I came within range. This I was determined at all costs to avoid, and I managed for a while to see him first and scurry in the opposite direction. One fine day, however, when we arrived at the theater for a rehearsal, Madame discovered that she had forgotten to bring her score. There were certainly a dozen available to her there but only her own would do. So she sent me flying all the way across the city from Bogenhausen to fetch it.

When I finally got back, heaving like a cart horse, I dashed toward the dressing room and ran full tilt into a group of people standing at the top of a short flight of steps. Fremstad was among them and, looking neither to the right or left, I rushed through to hand her the book which, of course, she no longer needed. Halting my headlong rush with an imperious hand and a reproachful "*Ich bitte dich, Kind, pass 'mal auf!*" she bade me turn and be introduced to the assemblage. In the center was none other than the Prince, with whom I had been playing hide-and-seek for days. This was it! I curtsied low—but behind me were those steps and down them backward I ignominiously slid. The Prince himself picked me up with professional concern, and discovering that no bones were broken, chucked me amiably under the chin (the first and last time anyone ever did) while general laughter rang out. Madame was as pleased with me as if I had purposely contrived the whole thing.

The only other untoward event in Munich that year was potentially a real disaster, precipitated by me and none other. That I survived and that the story had a happy ending seems, in retrospect, a miracle. I have said before that it sometimes struck me that Madame Fremstad thought of her various characters as a brood of turbulent daughters whom she had to clothe and placate; and in accordance with this fancy, it was natural for them to borrow each other's finery. Thus it happened that Isolde had an extra braid of hair which was sometimes loaned to Kundry, who had used it at the Good Friday *Parsifal* in New York that spring. For her it was a mere whim, but for Isolde it was essential as it fitted around inside her crown which would otherwise have wobbled. I suppose that somehow it got packed away after the performance with the rest of the Kundry things and was now reposing peacefully among mothballs in a cedar chest thousands of miles from Munich!

This paralyzing discovery was made when, three days before the first *Tristan*, Rike and I were getting the costumes ready. I opened the wig box, shook out the long auburn waves, and saw that the braid was not there—nor did a stealthy and desperate search reveal it to be in any corner or cranny of any other box or trunk! The enormity of my guilt quite overwhelmed me and my first impulse was simply to go out and cast myself into the Isar, thus ending my troubles. But by this time the axiom "Duty Before Pleasure," had been thoroughly hammered into me and I realized that I must save the situation without delay. I swore Rike to the strictest secrecy by hinting of the horrible consequences should Madame get wind of what had happened, then leaving her to cope as best she could, set forth upon my mission. Within the space of seventy-two hours I must manage to secure a braid so similar to the missing strand in color, texture, and weight that it might have some slight chance of passing muster.

This was not an easy project, for to seek help from the *perruquier* of the opera was out of the question: he would be sure to

tell someone and in no time all hell would break loose. So alone and singlehanded I wandered in quest of an accomplice. Finally I came upon an obscure little shop with a bit of false hair in the show window, and felt I might dare to enlist the sympathies of the proprietor, who seemed not over-pressed with business. Why he ever lacked for customers I could not imagine, for in spite of the obstacles which my limited German presented, this clever *friseur* entered wholeheartedly into the plot and managed to follow instructions perfectly as to size, thickness, and the requirement of a hidden wire in each of the three strands of a new braid. For color I boldly snipped a sample lock from the wig itself. The man knew how to charge too, and I paid what seemed to me a small fortune, so that I was unable to buy anything at all for myself in Europe that year.

So far, so good, but inevitably the hideous moment arrived when Madame, all unaware, must put this alien object on her head. The windows of the star dressing room in the Prinzregenten Theater look out upon the gardens, and I remember watching through the shutters the elegant ladies and gentlemen of the audience sipping coffee and strolling about before the performance, carefree and gay, all unconscious of the tragedy about to take place so near at hand. I had laid the braid in its proper place beside the crown on the dressing table, and with elaborate nonchalance had retired to a corner to busy myself about throat sprays and whatnot. But I watched from the tail of my eye, with the shuddering fascination a condemned man might feel, were he present at the sharpening of the axe. Whatever Olive Fremstad might say or do to me would be bad enough, but not really so vital as what the circumstance might do to her performance. I took a long breath as the room reeled around me—she had lifted the braid and was tucking it in place!

She regarded herself critically in the mirror, then started back in surprise. My heart ceased beating entirely. "What," she demanded in her harsh pre-performance whisper, "have you done to this?"

"Why nothing—nothing at all!" I managed to gasp—which



was strictly true as I had only just had time to unwrap the thing. "Is—is anything wrong?" I could scarcely get the words out.

"Oh no," said Isolde through a mouthful of hairpins. "It's just that *it seems a little better than usual!*"

The shock was severe, but my recovery was rapid. I left her to her mysteries and went out into the corridor and sent up a little private Te Deum. I don't know exactly what kind of a lesson this incident taught me, but it is indelibly written on my conscience. I have the braid in my possession now, cherished as a sort of hair shirt to keep me humble.

In spite of such inevitable contretemps the Munich performances went well. The local public, fully convinced beforehand that no perfect Carmen could ever be a perfect Isolde or Brünnhilde, came grudgingly to admit their folly, and if there had been horses attached to our homebound taxi, these would have been replaced by shouting admirers in the good, old-fashioned way. The critics were a little more cautious, not committing themselves wholeheartedly until after the *Siegfried* Brünnhilde, when they tossed their hats wildly in the air and capitulated. *Their* Olivchen had, they confessed, done *them* proud! This infuriated me at first, but Fremstad considered it endearing. "After all, Tinka," she confided, forgetting her recent suspicions, "these are my people: München *is* my home!"

Because of all this, life began to assume a more social aspect and the dusty corner of the Englischer Garten saw us less frequently. The clans began to gather from all directions and we soon had old friends from America as well as Germany besieging the flat on the Ohmstrasse. Delightful excursions were planned and many, as usual, included me. I now saw the city and fell more and more in love with it, as everyone did in those days. Madame had taken me, it is true, for a few nostalgic strolls; I had been shown the windows of her old *Wohnung* on the Maximilianstrasse, and we had visited her original dressing

room at the *Hofoper*, but now every Münchener who came to the house thought it an immediate duty to take the Fremstad's Fräulein out on a sight-seeing jaunt. Naturally I enjoyed this, but when I had a moment alone, I wistfully haunted the shops filled with painted peasant furniture and woven stuffs, red beeswax figurines and brocaded ribbon. All these were new to me and I coveted everything I saw. But alas, I was carrying home instead, as souvenir, a braid of bleached and dyed Chinese hair.

Charlie Dyer, who followed Fremstad everywhere, as the tail does a comet, now appeared on the scene, to the annoyance of Professor Fuchs of the opera, who liked to spend hours with us over a glass of iced coffee, contemplating with pompous satisfaction his garnet ring with the little golden fox, gleaming on Fremstad's finger. Most sensational of all our visitors was the young Graf von Moltke, gorgeous in his high-collared uniform and his monocle. Merely to watch him kiss a hand was a religious experience; and the click of his heels would start palpitations in any female breast, easiest of all, mine. In contrast to such magnificence we had often with us the comfortable and amusing Rosie, the delightful Cahiers and the touchingly faithful Taylors. Madame was so grateful to the Taylors for finding the apartment that she wished to revenge herself—as is the picturesque expression in German—and one day asked them what their hearts desired most.

"Seats for the Ring!" they caroled in unison, and straightway I was dispatched to the theater to procure this boon. When they called a little later to thank Madame, she detected an odd expression on their polite faces.

"Are the seats not good?" she inquired, ready to pounce on me if this were so.

"Oh, wonderful," they assured her, "but—well, you see, we didn't get any for *Das Rheingold*!"

Now Madame pounced indeed. "Tinka, *du Schafskopf, du!* How could you be so careless? I apologize for her," she added, "she is usually quite reliable."

The Taylors were wonderful. "I think you are to be congratu-

lated, *gnädige Frau*," said Loomis, "that you have a secretary for whom no operas exist except those in which you appear."

One fine day, in company with the American baritone Putnam Griswold, we drove down to Garmisch from Munich to see Richard Strauss, but the bird had flown. *Ariadne auf Naxos*, his newest opera, was being given in Munich that summer and he had been summoned to a rehearsal. It seems not to have occurred to him to leave us a message, but in spite of our disappointment we had a perfectly agreeable time without him. We ambled happily over the surrounding hills and ate for tea—in Strauss's own garden—a delicious dish new to me, a sort of scrambled pancake called *Kaiserschmarren*. Mr. Griswold was wonderful company and Fremstad liked the way he did things. His early death was a blow to us all.

I am sure the Garmisch visit would not have been half so pleasant if the famous composer had been there. I took a violent and unreasonable dislike to him when we met him after a performance of *Ariadne* which he had conducted in the charming little rococo *Residenztheater* (which Allied bombs later reduced to rubble). He bowed low over the hand of his first American Salome, and she was invited to a party given in his honor. I was much relieved not to be included, for although I was fully aware that I was meeting one of the giants of music, I thought him quite offensive. I murmured something of this kind to Madame next day and she replied that I was impertinent and certainly not worthy even to breathe the same air as the composer of *Der Rosenkavalier*. This was magnanimous, for Fremstad had not been given her way about singing Octavian in New York and none of that opera's laurels were for her. As for his tone poems, I doubt if any opera singer ever seriously considers a composer's purely orchestral works to be anything but a sideline. I never knew her to mention them.

More fascinating to me was another great man, Leopold Stokowski, who, with his new wife, Olga Samaroff, was summer-

ing in a Munich suburb that year. They came several times to the apartment and Fremstad was much impressed by Stokowski's Polish accent which, she claimed, had deepened considerably since their last meeting. She had always thought him a superlative showman. "Tinka," she said one afternoon as the door closed upon their visit, "I wonder if I should try to get back *my* accent. I had an authentic one, you know. It makes quite an impression, I see, and especially in America."

"Well," I said, "if you think you have lost it, you are wrong. You have just enough—it is perfect. So don't give it another thought."

She did give it several, however, after we got home, and tried some really absurd exaggerations on innocent people whom she met for the first time. But after one or two of them had courteously lapsed into German or Scandinavian to make the conversation, as they thought, easier for her, she quickly reverted to her normal speech. Her habit of mixing the languages of several nations in one sentence, of misusing archaic American slang, of rearranging the position of her verbs, and making literal translations, was exotic charm enough.

Our final weeks in Munich were marred for me by two occurrences. The first was a blow dealt us by Ulrike, who decided to marry her postman at once and settle down in Germany. Madame was outraged by such perfidy and wanted the girl to refund the price of her trip over, although actually it had been paid by the Metropolitan Opera Company. Eventually, however, she began to see the benevolent hand of Providence in this apparent disaster. "She wouldn't have stayed with us forever, anyway, Tinka, with that man on her mind," she told me. "Now we will put an *annonce* in the paper for a cook to go with us to America, and there will be a thousand answers—you will see!"

There were not quite so many, as it happened, but enough. From among them we chose a sturdy blonde with muscles like the Powerful Katinka. Her name was Hedwig and she came at once, Rike departing in a flood of happy tears.

Now began for me a season of purgatory. I was informed by Madame that no German maid would respect you unless you stood over her every minute and supervised her work, calling her to account briskly and often, if for no better reason than the good of her soul. I did not see what earthly use it would be for me to hang about the kitchen; my own ignorance would become all too apparent in the first half hour. But Madame insisted. "You don't expect me to do it, do you? Or shall I give up my career?"

"Oh no, no, no!" I wailed. "Of course not. I'll do it, but it's silly!"

"And don't forget to lock up the sugar," added Madame. "She will expect that. You may dole it out to her only as she needs it. That is the way the Germans always do."

It was indeed! During my sad days at Hedwig's elbow I often looked across the narrow courtyard to another kitchen where I saw and heard a German *Hausfrau* exercising her precious authority over a cringing little maid who never lifted her eyes from her pots and pans. I think that World Wars I and II were hatched in my bosom at that moment.

Perhaps Hedwig had been led to hope for something better from the American family, or perhaps my ignorance was more than she could bear. At any rate her stay with us was brief. Rike postponed her nuptials and returned to us for the remainder of the season, but eventually we crossed the ocean alone.

As soon as Rike came back and peace descended once more, Madame had one of those warm impulses which endeared her to so many, but which were usually left to others to carry out—in this case, to me. She invited Dora Köberl, wife of the farmer at Villa Lerchenreit in Aussee, to visit us. Not only did I have to put a cot in my room and share my quarters with this timid creature from the hinterland, but I had to show her day by day the sights of Munich, foregoing all other diversions. I loved Frau Köberl dearly in Aussee; she belonged there with complete perfection. But in the city no one could have been more difficult. She insisted on eating with Ulrike, but I had her company

the rest of the day. I took her to see Madame's portrait in the Alte Pinakothek; I walked her endlessly through the parks and past the shops on the Neuhauserstrasse; I took her to rehearsals where she sat rapt but bewildered; and one inspired day I took her to the zoo. After that all was easy; every morning I asked her what she wanted to see, and every morning she answered, "*Tiergarten, bitte!*" The animals were something she could understand and they never lost their fascination, even with the whole Nibelungen Ring as an alternative attraction.

She longed to be helpful, and did all our accumulated mending, and I even tried her out as assistant dresser at the theater. She drove Madame quite mad with her inability to grasp what all the pother was about, and got hopelessly tangled and confused in the high-tension routine of our professional life. She did everything she could to earn her little holiday amid all the excitement so alien to her quiet mountain soul, but I think she enjoyed the experience much more later, when it became enshrined in her memory, and that no moment of it—unless those spent at the zoo—was actually as satisfactory to her as that in which I put her on the train at the *Hauptbahnhof* and bade her farewell. When I wrote in my day-book, after *Götterdämmerung*—with a sigh so deep that it rustles the yellowing pages after all these years—"Livan has sung the Ring; it is all over! Lord, I'm glad!" I think that the expediting of Dora Köberl back to the green pastures of Steiermark was the climax of my relief.

There is no doubt at all that Fremstad's *Götterdämmerung* Brünnhilde was the pinnacle of her success in Munich—possibly elsewhere too. She herself considered it her greatest role from the standpoint of characterization and often said, "It is the end. Further one cannot go!" In my department it presented few terrors because a single costume, with the addition of a black veil and circlet in the final scene, sufficed for all three acts, and I had plenty of time to watch the wonders on the

stage. I must add, however, that she needed more time to detach herself from the world when preparing to sing this role than for any other. I spent so many hours in the corridor, shut away from the mystically silent dressing room, that I equipped myself with a folding stool which from then on became part of our regulation theater baggage.

This Brünnhilde was molded in classic grandeur and simplicity. She wore a plain, straight gown of heavy raw silk specially woven for her in Italy, with open sleeves, and bound beneath her breast with thongs of leather. (After all, she had given the rest of her wardrobe to Siegfried for his Rhine Journey; some singers forget this.) Fremstad never believed in waistlines; her girdles and belts were tied above or below or both—like those of the carved, straight saints on medieval cathedrals. "When a woman puts a string around her waist, her figure is outlined in scallops," she would say.

Olive Fremstad, the singing actress who was herself of the Norseland; to whom sorrow and exaltation, sacrifice and courage, were the natural elements of life, slipped into Brünnhilde's heart and mind with an unearthly familiarity, and every step she took, every gesture of arms, head, and soaring brows was so eloquent, so exactly right, that no audience could witness her performance without being deeply stirred. As she colored her actions, so did the great, dark, emotional voice convey the identical impressions to the ear. Her joyous farewell to Siegfried; her brooding contemplation of his Ring; her broken-hearted rejection of Waltraute's pleading; her horror and terror as the stranger, who is no stranger, makes her captive—all this composed a first act which sent the public into paroxysms of applause.

But after the second act, when they had seen her enter the Gibichung Hall, her eyes deeply sunken in a stone-white face, her wrists crossed before her as if bound with cords; had witnessed her breathless lunge forward, pushing the henchmen aside to take her bitter oath on the spear; had watched her stand with the two conspirators, bewildered and betrayed to an un-

worthy act from which she knew that her ancient runes and goddess-wisdom might have saved her—all in the audience felt an overwhelming compulsion to rise up and shout, to toss programs into the air, to stamp thunderously and beat upon the chair backs. This they did with predictable regularity, and I in my *coulisse*, dizzy with pride and wonder, scolded myself for all my own shortcomings and thought how privileged I was even to tie her sandals.

The great Immolation scene always suggested to me that majestic, eerie calm which settles over high mountain peaks after a shattering alpine storm. When the Fremstad Brünnhilde walked quietly out of the shadows to stand beside the dead Siegfried, one knew that the end of the pagan gods was at hand. She could endow all that now transpired with an otherworldliness quite inaccessible to the ordinary mortal—and certainly to most opera singers. This was her special gift and it came from the deep ground-roots of her past.

The final scene contained for her none of the material anxieties which beset some other singers. She never worried, for example, about what Grane, the horse, might suddenly decide to do. Fremstad loved all animals, even this poor old hack who was having his brief hour of glory, and trusted to their natural dignity. At moments when she had to sing very close beside her *Luft-Ross*, I have seen her reach up and turn his pricking, anxious ear gently away from the path of her high notes. She never attempted the dashing exploit suggested by the composer, of springing into the funeral pyre on Grane's back. This was left to a super in Munich, and to the imagination, at the Metropolitan. But I am sure that if necessary, Fremstad could have done it, *con brio*. It would have been something to see.

The Munich Wagnerites, accustomed to their fat, plodding Brünnhildes, were startled into ecstasies by this comparatively slim and obviously inspired daughter of the gods. Professor Fuchs came to the dressing room with tears in his eyes and, for once forgetting to be pompous, humbly admitted that he had no criticism to make—had, in fact, himself learned something



that day. There could not have been a more fitting finale to her season *als Gast*, and Madame departed for a refreshing week or two in Aussee with an invitation from the Intendant in her pocket to sing the Kundry next summer in the first performance of *Parsifal* ever to be given in Germany outside the sacred precincts of Bayreuth.

Confident of this triumphant return, she took an option on the Ohmstrasse flat for another season, and packed up a number of articles to leave in Aussee over the intervening months. About this time, too, she received an invitation to make a tour of Norway in opera and concert, under royal auspices. It seemed very odd to me that she rejected this at once, without giving it, apparently, more than passing consideration.

"But why not?" I argued, longing to see the fjords and the midnight sun under such glamorous circumstances.

"The miserable fee they offer," she said crossly.

"But it is exactly what Munich pays . . ."

"My dear Tinka, Norway is my homeland. I am not impressed by cheap honors!"

I think that when it was already too late to change her mind, she regretted this decision. She made it up to Norway, however, by giving a benefit concert for the Brooklyn Norwegian Hospital the following season and endowing a room in her name. As for Munich—although she could not know it then—she was never again to sing on its stages as Kundry or in any other role.

## Chapter 21

IT IS SIGNIFICANT that in what proved to be Olive Fremstad's last season at the Metropolitan, the public was to hear her only twice as this third Brünnhilde, and not at all as either of the other two. In fact, her mightiest achievements seemed patently slighted; she was cast eight times as Sieglinde, six times as Elsa,

yet sang only three Isolde and three Kundrys. Add to this the fact that the management substituted eight concert appearances for operatic roles, and it is not too much to suspect that the initial moves were already being made in that devious political game which ended with Mr. Gatti's failure to renew her contract and her departure from the Metropolitan never to return.

When, shortly after Christmas, the first rumors of trouble began to circulate, her rivals and their friends, the gossips, had a field day. "Aha!" they exclaimed, licking their lips. "The voice must be going. Just exactly what we said would happen when she decided the contralto roles were not big enough for her ego!" But they spoke out of turn. Her voice was never in better shape, in spite of a summer with little rest, and her personal spell over the public was stronger than ever. She had more concert engagements than she could accept and was so busy during the autumn that there had not even been time for us to run up to Maine—as she so longed to do—for a glimpse of Little Walhalla before rehearsals began.

The opera season opened smoothly for her and continued without spectacular incident or explosion until the end. Rather, it seemed, from week to week, to glow with an intenser inner fire, as if both she and the public felt—they did not yet know—that everything she did on the Metropolitan stage that year must be carefully garnered, cherished, and enshrined for memory's sake. She enjoyed excellent health that winter, and had no real troubles but those of the spirit, which always harassed her.

There were no new roles, but I made the acquaintance of an old one, her Fricka in *Rheingold*, which she sang on a single occasion. This was a role upon which Mr. Gatti was not accustomed to lavish his most expensive singers, and Fremstad had not sung it for five seasons. But by thus seeming to demote her, he aroused no resentment at all, for she doted on the part, brief as it was. First of all, it was easy; it lay well for her and suited her style; moreover, it provided one of her few opportunities to earn a full *cachet* without much effort. This she could accept

without apology for, as she explained to Charlie Dyer in her dressing room that afternoon, "It is not trivial—I can get my teeth in it. And I earn my money honestly, even if, for once, I'm not killing myself!"

In spite of this she gave the role her all. Her Fricka was an irresistible charmer from the moment she rose, in the morning dews and damps, from the rock which she had been sharing in connubial austerity with Wotan, until, filled with misgivings, she joined the final procession up the Rainbow Bridge toward her new house. She wore the Venus wig disguised with a fillet of wrought iron, there were iron spirals on her arms, and a necklace of the same dark metal crossed her breast to fasten her cloak which was the green of the young forest. In the dressing room, less nervous than usual, she explained to me the reason for these rather crude *bijoux*—at least she put it to me in the form of one of those irritating Wagnerian riddles:

"Now you tell me, Tinka, why it is that I, Wotan's wife, have no jewelry made of gold?"

A great light dawned. I had never thought of this before! "Why, of course—the Rhine Maidens had it all!"

"Good girl!" she said; and added a little sadly, "So few know, or even care. I wonder sometimes, what they think we are talking about."



As soon as we plunged into the winter's work—or into Real Life, as she always liked to think—Madame's social contacts and other forms of recreation were sternly curtailed. The whirl of the past summer had been pleasant enough but, characteristically, she was afraid to continue existence in this pattern: it ran so contrary to her invincible belief that whatever was done the hard way was done best. Rehearsals were at a minimum in the familiar repertoire of that, my third season with her, but she never relaxed. Her divine discontent with her own best efforts prodded her to undiminished study. Each time she was scheduled to repeat an old role, one would have supposed

it to be brand-new because of the relentless hours of preparation she gave to it—often in mind only, in silence, behind closed doors.

In the brash omniscience of youth—resenting what I could not share—I was certain that such periods of withdrawal were bad for her when unrelieved. So, when she firmly refused to see any people, I dragged her about to plays and movies. The legitimate theater, unless Ibsen or Shakespeare, frankly bored her, and few were the actors who won her approval; she always suspected them of insincerity and bluff. On the other hand, she loved operetta, all sorts of dancing, horseplay and slapstick. She enjoyed the circus and once smuggled Mimi in to see the trained animals, and went right out again because they broke her heart.

The movies were Fremstad's great solace. They seemed very real to her, and their tear-jerking sentimentality went right over her head. She would sit contentedly for hours in the darkened playhouse watching the dreamlike flickers until some unfortunate wretch near her chanced to cough. This, like a fire alarm, would be the signal for precipitate flight. Up the aisle she would sweep in panic haste, followed by me, laden with all the wraps she had forgotten, and Mimi prancing openly before the shocked eyes of the ushers. When the "talkies" came in, her pleasure vanished. "Horrible, horrible voices!" she complained. "There is too much talking in the world anyway!"

Miss Willa Cather, the writer—not then so famous as she later became—was my most steadfast ally. She too felt that Fremstad ought to see more of her fellow men, and often took her to matinees or invited her to wonderful little French meals at her apartment on Bank Street. Madame, while unresisting, would still protest, "But I get nothing from people!"

"An artist learns from everyone she meets, from everything she sees!" Miss Cather would remind her.

"What I learn, I find here!" Olive Fremstad insisted, in a cello voice, her eyebrows climbing, both hands pressed to her heart.

This melodramatic gesture might have seemed absurd in another, but she was in deadly earnest and was, to her own knowledge, absolutely right. A smile would have been an impertinence.

We had met Miss Cather during the latter part of the previous season; actually, I am told, on that very day when Fremstad sang at such short notice the role of Giulietta in *Hoffmann*. Madame had blithely gone for a drive in the country and left me to cope with an expected interviewer from *McClure's Magazine*. This proved to be Willa Cather, at that time one of the magazine's editors, who was preparing a special article about three American singers: Homer, Farrar, and Fremstad. The first two had been duly disposed of; Miss Cather was saving until last, she frankly said, the one who interested her most. This was no reflection upon the other artists, but Cather had then in the works a new novel, *The Song of the Lark*, based in some measure on what she had imaginatively reconstructed of Olive Fremstad's early life. She now wished to prop up the fiction with fact and fill in occasional blanks by personal observation.

In this she was somewhat thwarted that first afternoon. How deadly to be confronted by a humble young acolyte instead of by the priestess herself! I was much embarrassed, and expected to see her turn on a peevish heel and slam the door in my face. But this was not Willa Cather's way. She sat down quite happily with me and asked me all the questions which she thought it would be fair for me to answer. She laid the groundwork for her article, and had a fleeting glimpse of her heroine—rather tired and wind-blown—as a consolation prize at the end. Later, upon a more leisurely occasion, she was able to have her interview, unhampered by the need for gathering statistics.

This was the beginning of a rewarding friendship which lasted well into the years when Miss Cather's own work began to make demands for which she had to conserve her energies. She was a gay companion and always a sympathetic student of the artist's nature. Madame was delighted with the article

when it appeared during her final Metropolitan season, and told the author that her penetration and insight were uncanny. But she was less enthusiastic about *The Song of the Lark*, which was published a little later. "My poor Willa," she once said in my hearing, "it wasn't really much like that. But after all, what can you know about me? Nothing!"

Miss Cather took this in good part, neither complaining nor explaining. She knew what she knew, and she had got what she wanted. The book was quite a conspicuous success, and actually, her Thea Kronberg had never been publicly labeled Olive Fremstad. So she and Madame remained on the best of terms. Later that season the singer, followed by me with the collected floral offerings from a performance of the night before, went to see Miss Cather in the hospital where she lay ingloriously stricken by an infection from a hatpin, having lost an important section of scalp. The sufferer was invited to visit Little Walhalla that spring to recuperate. Much to my surprise she accepted, and actually stayed there with us for a week.

During that visit I came to know her better and admire her even more, for we had a week of typical storm and stress. The cook left; the plumbing ceased to function; and Madame's mood was joyless and grim. Miss Cather lent me a cheerful hand in the successive emergencies, mopped up my tears, and exhorted Madame to a higher heart. Presently, through her efforts, the sun came out and the clouds rolled away, and when she departed—doubtless with secret relief—she left at least one staunch disciple behind.



By the middle of March it was impossible longer to ignore the clouds piling up on the horizon. Madame became preoccupied and evasive, and even I, humble buffer though I was, found myself featured in the press as "the singer's secretary who said her employer had no comment to make." As the reporters hounded me in search of information which I did not have, I was at once stimulated and enormously depressed. There was

the air of doom blowing through our days and, like all faithful dogs, Mimi felt it keenly. She took permanent refuge beneath Madame's bed, growling gently from time to time. The trouble was, of course, the question of a contract renewal at the Metropolitan.

As the season waned the ultimate moment approached in which no top-ranking singer might, with any self-respect, continue to sit silent on the anxious bench. Mr. Gatti gave no sign and Mr. William Guard, in his unenviable role of middleman, spent sleepless nights thinking up evasions. To the press he gave out such dubious statements as: "It is too early for the more important contracts to be negotiated," or "Mr. Gatti must wait for Madame Fremstad to approach him on the matter."

Madame bade me deny both of these untruths, but otherwise kept her own counsel. She did her work at the opera as usual, adding perhaps just a little extra flourish of diligence and devotion for the benefit of those who had eyes to see what was going on beneath the surface. The first occasion upon which the public became really alerted was the performance of *Götterdämmerung* on March 13th. The house was packed and the atmosphere electric; the applause had a note of mounting hysteria—as if there were many present who feared they might never hear this wonderful Fremstad Brünnhilde again. The demonstration at the close was so prolonged that the weary singer, who had sprained her ankle during Act I,\* could no longer force even the ghost of a smile. She was suffering too much to care greatly about a curious maneuver which I noticed from my place beside the encore drop. A new tenor, Rudolf Berger, who had made a favorable debut some weeks earlier, was singing the Siegfried that night. As the applause increased, one or two of the managerial staff, who always gathered around at such moments, pressed close to Herr Berger and all but propelled him to the footlights although, to do him justice, he seemed reluctant to share what was obviously not intended for him. In spite of plainly heard shouts of "Fremstad! We want

\* See page 115.

Fremstad!" the signal was given over and over again for all the principals to file out, alternating with the soprano and tenor together. It was only when angry muttering became audible beneath the applause that Fremstad was permitted two solo bows. The pandemonium which straightway broke loose was ignored and the asbestos curtain was lowered with finality.

Much the same sort of thing happened at a performance of *Walküre* two weeks later, and this time Madame found it more difficult to remain aloof. She was singing Sieglinde, with Gadski as the Brünnhilde; and during the intermission applause, so many elaborate floral pieces were piled at the feet of the German soprano that Fremstad had to pick her way cautiously among them to take her own bows. As more and more of the wreaths, baskets, and sheaves kept arriving, it was noticeable that the laden pages, while passing in and out, made a point of stepping between Fremstad and the public, no matter in what order the line of singers re-formed. This was so blatantly a planned stratagem that I stood watching it, transfixed with astonishment. I cannot imagine why I should have been so surprised: from my habitual stand in the dressing room corridor I had often heard certain artists naïvely ordering their own bouquets and giving careful instructions for their presentation. This exhibition, however, went a little too far; it was incredibly childish and I think it deceived no one. Madame dealt with it in characteristic style. Although there were many flowers there for her as well, she refused to have them brought before the footlights. As she left the theater that night she gave explicit directions that henceforth she would receive all such tokens in her dressing room only. Thus she yielded the field to her rivals, who must have found their victory flat and unprofitable with the element of competition removed. In any case, *La bataille des fleurs* as a standard entr'acte diversion at the Metropolitan was doomed from that moment.

The rumblings in the press now increased and letters began to pour in: to the music editors; to the management; to Madame herself. I shared the general bewilderment. I could see no



sense at all in any policy—spiteful or otherwise—which must inevitably result in a loss for the Metropolitan Opera, not only in prestige, but in cold cash. Fremstad's art was at its zenith just then, and her popularity too. Audiences were enormous; enthusiasm unbounded. It seemed obstinate and puerile for an impresario to allow himself to be influenced either by personal spleen or social pressure. "Olive Fremstad is *very difficult*" announced one of the communiqués from Billy Guard's office, in extenuation of the delay about her contract. Of course she was—no one knew this better than Tinka, her buffer! But I felt that Charles Henry Meltzer, critic of the *American*, summed up the matter with insight and sympathy as he reviewed the tense situation in his column:

"Women of the Fremstad type, striving for ideals and realizing the hopelessness of even their most strenuous efforts, are apt to be moody. It is one of their privileges. They are sometimes restive, hard to manage, and unreasonable. Almost invariably, too, they are unpractical. But what care we, if they are artists like Madame Fremstad?" And, as another New York paper, quoting him, added: "To the experienced critic and music lover the artistic presentation is, after all, everything!" These remarks were typical; the press as one man rushed to align itself on the Fremstad side as the tide of protest rose. But soon there were still deeper currents awash beneath the Rainbow Bridge.

In a March issue of *Musical America* that year there appeared the report of a gala dinner given at the Ritz by Madame Gadski and her husband, Captain Hans Tauscher, to which were invited Mr. and Mrs. Gatti-Casazza, the chief conductors of the opera and their wives, several of the artists, and a powerful cross-section of the Metropolitan board, and the box-holders. This feast was in celebration of Madame Gadski's contract which had just been renewed for a larger number of performances, and the supposed arrangement of a much curtailed, if

not actually abrogated, contract with Fremstad, her traditional rival. The report goes on to say that during the meal Mr. Gatti spilled the salt—symbol of dissension—and in it traced with cryptic finger the letters K-U-R-T. This was taken to indicate the soprano Melanie Kurt, who had been engaged for all the Fremstad-Gadski roles in the season of 1914-1915.

Johanna Gadski's own contract was allowed to lapse unchallenged three years later, and she departed from the Metropolitan under a cloud of suspicion and general dislike. This was understandable, as war with Germany had then been declared and her husband, Captain Tauscher, had left the country in company with Ambassador von Bernstorff as soon as diplomatic relations were severed. It is certain that the Gadski-Tauschers were responsible for many un-American utterances, which may have been natural under the circumstances, but were also highly indiscreet. There was a persistent rumor that after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, Madame Gadski had given another of her gala dinners, this time to celebrate that shocking event; that toasts had been drunk to the commander of the attacking submarine; and that Otto Goritz, one of the guests, had sat at the piano and done a grisly paraphrase of the cries and laments of the victims. In all fairness it must be said that this particular detail was never proved. Nevertheless, the New York *Herald Tribune*, having reported something of these distasteful goings-on, was sued for libel by the German soprano, who lost the suit.

After the *Götterdämmerung*, with its first of the Fremstad farewell demonstrations, the season of 1913-14 moved swiftly to its close. An Elsa and a Sieglinde were sung in Brooklyn, and in Manhattan there was a Kundry on Good Friday as usual. But in the meantime Madame Fremstad had decided to make an overt move in the cat-and-mouse game taking place in the offices of the opera.

"I never heard of such a thing in my entire career," she told me, "but if they are saying down there that it is discourteous of

me not to call on Mr. Gatti, then I will go. No one is allowed to criticize my manners!"

So, dressed in one of her most dashing Parisian outfits, after a careful hour devoted to a perfect coiffure and make-up, she descended upon 39th Street. She was so gay and vivacious of manner that one would certainly have thought, to see her, that all was right with her world. This was as she intended; no one must suspect that she cared so much as a mascaraed eyelash for operatic contracts—which was just as well, for she came back empty-handed.

I did not go down with her; only the elect ever entered Mr. Gatti's private office. But during her absence I paced the apartment like a prima donna myself, in an agony of apprehension. Should the axe descend, as I feared it might, what was to happen to all of us? I wrung my hands in pity for the artist cut off from the chief channel of her art; for the opera-loving public bereft of this artist's power to stir their hearts and their imaginations; and lastly for myself without my lovely job—or certainly without its brightest recompense. I feared that I was growing more and more like Madame, with life's reality centering upon a lighted stage, for already it was impossible for me to think beyond the fall of the curtain.

At last I heard her step in the hall and flew to meet her. One glance—and I knew by the curl of her lip and the hard glitter in her eye that the worst had happened. She told me at once in some detail what she thought I ought to hear. Her account of the interview with Gatti was remarkably frank, and knowing them both, it was easy enough for me to reconstruct the scene. Her opening gambit had been, it seems, no more than a tactful wish that the approaching summer holiday would be a pleasant one for the Gatti-Casazzas; she was going to be so busy after her last performances that she would probably not find time to drop in again! Was Mr. Gatti going, by chance, to Germany? If so, he must be sure to hear the dramatic soprano, Melanie Kurt.

The impresario, though schooled in every variety of prima-donna tactics, confessed himself surprised by this frontal attack: "Come, come, Fremstad, that is unworthy! You know perfectly well that we think of bringing Madame Kurt over here next season."

"How very sensible of you, Mr. Gatti! Otherwise, of course, the German repertoire would fall too heavily on Madame Gadski. I—if I am here at all—wish to sing a much-shortened season, for I have many concert commitments. And, incidentally, any new contract must include that clause of which I have so often spoken: no rehearsals called on the day of a performance, on the day before, or on the day after. That is only humane."

I could picture Mr. Gatti leaning back, his thumbs thrust into the armholes of his vest—that ominous pose! And the careful, measured words: "*Cara*, if we give you this contract, we will make it longer, not shorter. Your repertoire is too limited; you are too expensive; you should sing more roles!"

Fremstad would have liked very much to say "*Quatsch!*" but she kept herself in hand. "When have I ever refused to learn new roles—even that disgusting *Giulietta*—tell me that?"

Mr. Gatti must have looked at her reproachfully as he uttered the single word "*Mona!*" recalling Horatio Parker's unfortunate opus done in English two seasons before.

"It was a fiasco, was it not? I was right!"

"We need not go into particulars, *carina*. The facts are that we find ourselves dissatisfied with the limitations of your repertoire: you have repeatedly told us that you are unhappy here under conditions which we cannot ameliorate. We wish no longer to distress you and are therefore taking you at your word. We view your departure from the company with regret, of course, but will make no further effort to detain you!"

Very gracious; very suave; but the fist which came down on the desk to punctuate his words struck a little too sharply. Olive Fremstad recognized finality when she met it and she was not only a good sport but a good actress. "That is certainly a great relief to me, dear Mr. Gatti. I can now go ahead with

my concert plans, so thank you very much. But, by the way, I have a last favor to ask; I think that I have earned one, after these eleven years. Is another *Tristan* scheduled this season?"

"For the last night, Saturday, I believe."

"Well, I should like to sing my farewell here in the role of Isolde, if it is not too much to ask. . . . I have had numerous requests from the public. It would be gracious, would it not?"

"Possibly yes," said Mr. Gatti cautiously. "We shall see."

Reporters had camped on our door mat ever since the first vague rumors of trouble, but after the Gatti interview we had to let them in. Statements from both sides were in order, but what the Metropolitan was willing to divulge did not conform with Madame's version. It was said at the opera that Fremstad had asked for an extended contract but had been offered one greatly curtailed, and had thereupon resigned from the company in a storm of resentment. This tale was more in agreement with the burden of Madame Gadski's dinner conversation than with what really happened. Madame Fremstad, aware that all was water over the dam by this time, entered into no further controversy. She contented herself with an impressive announcement of the transcontinental tour that her concert managers, Foster and David, were booking for her. All interviews were now concerned with her entry into this comparatively new field and with her satisfaction at this opportunity to draw closer to her audiences than the more formal medium of grand opera had permitted. Here was a real crisis in Olive Fremstad's life and she met it, I observed, with philosophic calm. A piece of burnt toast at breakfast might be permitted to ruin her day, but not this imbroglio which threatened her career itself. It was the old pattern of the pennies and the dollars: she was big and she could deal diplomatically with big things—small matters threw her.

Her lofty mood was shaken, however, when we heard how the final operas of the season were to be cast. I had always

thought it odd that the Metropolitan stars were given such short notice of performances. Printed slips with date, opera, and role inked in, were sent casually through the mails in what was considered ample time, but often the earliest warning which a singer had of an impending appearance was the house advertisement in the newspaper. Thus it came about that our first intimation of the final indignity to be offered Olive Fremstad by the Metropolitan was gathered from the notice in the *New York Times*, which published the casts for the closing week of opera. *Tristan* was indeed billed for the Saturday evening, but the Isolde was to be Johanna Gadski! We simply could not believe it! But there was even worse to follow. Olive Fremstad's valedictory role was to be Elsa in *Lohengrin*; a part in which she was always beautiful but sometimes uncomfortable because of the high *tessitura*. It was well known not to be her favorite role nor that of her public. To make matters worse, it was scheduled for the Thursday, traditionally, at that time, an off night for the subscribers.

It seemed unlikely that this assignment occurred as an item of routine casting; there was wiliness and a touch of the vindictive all too apparent. This impression was underscored by that ultimate slap in the face—the billing of her actual farewell at the Sunday night concert which would wind up the season. As everyone realized at once, this concert had in itself even less distinction than usual, for the better part of the company would by that time be off on tour. The program of leftovers surrounding Madame Fremstad could not hope to frame the occasion suitably, nor to attract the lustrous audience which should be present to wish such a great artist Godspeed.

When she heard this news Madame seized the telephone and, with neither argument nor explanation, canceled this final appearance. By this gesture she forfeited one thousand dollars, just as the management had doubtless counted upon her to do. To the press it was officially pointed out as an instance of Fremstad's unreasonableness and lack of co-operation, but this fooled no one. Loud was the outcry in every music column in the city,

and at the Good Friday *Parsifal* the demonstration in her behalf at the close of Act II almost exceeded propriety. At long last the public was fully aware of its imminent loss and literally was not taking it sitting down. People climbed on seats and mobbed the corridors, shouted themselves hoarse, and went home to write more angry letters. The critics counted twenty-five curtain calls and, after Mr. Berger had been persuaded that the enthusiasm was not entirely for his debut in the title role, Fremstad took seven calls alone. Even from the auditorium it could be noticed that there were tears in her eyes, and many besides myself (standing quite overwhelmed inside the curtain) heard her quick, whispered "Good-by! Good-by!"

The *Times* next morning admitted that the ovation had been unparalleled, and the *Sun* professed in words more fervid than customary for such a conservative news-sheet: "She will leave behind her memories most beautiful!"

## Chapter 22

THERE IS no point in claiming that our home life went on as usual throughout this period of tension. It did not. In the first place, impressed with the seething of events, the maids stayed on their jobs—truly a noble concession—and the cook even hinted that a month in the Maine woods was worth considering at a price. Such are the wages of publicity! The summer plans ceased to worry me for there were spring concerts pending, and we were due in Munich again by July. To get through the next few days with flags still flying was my one objective. In the solemn period between the *Parsifal* and the final *Lohengrin*, there was a *Tannhäuser* which, contrary to the general rule, was sold out in advance. The *Evening Mail* remarked that this was the largest audience *Tannhäuser* had drawn for many years, and attributed this phenomenon to the obvious rush of Frem-

stad fans to hear the beloved Venus for the last time. Madame Gadski, who was the Elisabeth that night, doubtless placed quite a different interpretation upon this enthusiasm, but she was not allowed to measure it in terms of arrogant bouquets.

Meanwhile there were more and more interviews; daily posing for photographs; interminable talks with Mr. David of the concert bureau and the members of his public relations staff. I mooned around in the costume room, sighing mournfully over each wig, crown, and mantle as I laid it away, almost as if they were all dead children. Every thought was now concentrated on the 23rd of April; the final performance at the opera. I counted the hours with gloomy resignation, quite as if they led to the scaffold. For me this date seemed to be the end of everything. Oddly enough, however, Madame was extraordinarily cheerful—or so she seemed. What she really suffered, once her door had closed at night and she was alone I can only guess. But no true stage artist can long remain indifferent to acclaim, no matter how melancholy the occasion; and during this time the fulsome rhapsodies to be found daily in the newspaper columns and in the mails were almost embarrassing. Were these not still available, lodged in scrapbooks and files, preserved in cold printers' ink, one might well be incredulous and suspect them to be no more than inventions of a too ardent imagination. But there they are, in plain English, for the skeptical to read!

The emotional tension increased, of course, with every tick of the clock. Finally the eventful Thursday did arrive and I wrote in my diary: "Feel as if it were the day of a funeral!" This impression was supported by the boxes of flowers which kept arriving at the apartment every five or ten minutes, with sentiments of mourning attached. Finally I hid them ruthlessly in the costume room and suppressed the cards, sending Madame off to bed after lunch with strict orders not to open her door until I came to call her. "Now don't think about anything at all—except possibly a little speech. You'll probably be required to make one, you know!" I warned her, thereby robbing her of all chance of sleep.



"Tinka, that is absurd. The public has never heard my speaking voice. Why begin now?" But I could see by a wild look in her eyes that the idea had taken hold.

Almost automatically I went through the motions which preceded any performance. The score, the veil, the shawl, the boots, were all laid out as usual. But when I arrived at the theater the dressing room with its banks of flowers was scarcely recognizable; the funeral parlor analogy was a little too striking, and prompt action was required. I took a rather large responsibility upon myself by calling in the chief curtain-pager.

"I'm afraid that all these must be removed before Madame gets here or she will suffocate. And," I told him, "in view of the occasion I think we might disobey orders for once, and have them, and any others which may come, presented on the stage after the second act."

"Others!" he exclaimed. "My God, Miss Watkins, just take a look out here!" Sure enough, piled in a corner of the corridor were more than twice as many boxes and bouquets. He joined me willingly in the conspiracy and unlocking one of the small dressing rooms we put the whole mass in there, opened its slit of window and firmly turned the key on our secret. When Madame arrived there was scarcely a whiff of fragrance to alarm her.

It was a very special performance of *Lohengrin* that evening, in its own right. Louise Homer was in the cast and Berger, Goritz, and our old friend Herbert Witherspoon; and from the rise of the first curtain there was excitement in the air. Fremstad never sang better, favorite role or no, and when she entered with her train of white-robed maidens, the audience threw decorum aside and almost stopped the music with the noise of their greeting. The same thunder met her appearance before the curtain after the act, but she still had much work to do, and no ovation, no matter how insistent, must be allowed to interfere with that. She cut her acknowledgment short with a little deprecatory smile and rushed for the dressing room where, in an atmosphere of thoroughly artificial calm, Musaeus, Bella, and I went about our duties on tiptoe.

It was after the second act that the real storm broke loose. "Tinka," Madame whispered to me during an instant of rest snatched between the endless curtain calls, "God has been good to me after all. If this were an Isolde, I should not be able to finish!"

It was Fremstad's night and none of the other singers dreamed of sharing it after their first few bows together as a cast. Before the doting eye of the public the men kissed her hand and the women her cheek, and then withdrew, leaving the applause to her. Behind the curtain the chorus stood assembled to present her with a beautiful rope of Roman pearls which the *doyenne*, Marie Savage, hung about her neck. Fremstad was deeply touched by this, but a few minutes later, as she came around the end of the drop curtain, the string caught and snapped. "Oh, oh!" she cried out in superstitious horror, as the pearls rolled in all directions. "Bad luck again . . . it is a sign!" There was a hysterical catch in her throat, but Marie Savage promptly saved the situation. "Only see, dear Madame Fremstad," she said, her arm around Elsa's trembling shoulders as she watched me pursuing the scattered beads, "pearls are tears, you know—and these are the tears of the chorus falling on this stage because you leave it!"

Madame looked around at the well-upholstered court ladies and knights behind her and, true enough, their make-up was running down their cheeks. Her own eyes filled dangerously. But now from the house was heard the insistent demand for "Speech! . . . Speech!" and panic replaced sentiment. "Tinka, I can't, I tell you!" she gasped. Madame Homer and I gave her an encouraging little shove and suddenly she was out there before the footlights alone. She raised her hand and the house grew silent. Then that dark velvet speaking voice which the public had never heard said slowly and shakily:

"I have never made a speech in all my life!" She caught the great golden tassel of the curtain with her right hand and clung to it while the loving, responsive murmur rose to meet her. She found that tassel comforting throughout the brief, poignant

utterance that followed, and I prayed fervently that it would not ruin everything by collapsing in her grasp. But it held fast and she continued, in words that were strange in that gilded setting, and were quoted by the papers next day as "the most remarkable in operatic history."

"Before I leave I must thank you from the bottom of my heart for your unfailing kindness, your encouragement, and your sympathy. I have always tried to give you of my best—my very best!" For a moment she paused, released the tassel and raised both arms toward her public. Her next words were enigmatic and disturbing. "Good-by, dear friends—may God bless you and may we meet again someday where all is peace and harmony!"

There followed that wonderful hush which all orators dream of, presently broken by sobs from every corner of the house. Then suddenly there was a roar like Donner's storms or the waters of the Rhine at flood. The audience rose to her and refused to let her from their sight. Seven times more she came out to bow, threading her way with difficulty among the masses of flowers which had grown like a magic garden knee-deep around her.

"Madam," began the chief page, "what do you want us to do with all those wreaths?"

Fremstad's tears were overflowing now; she made a helpless gesture and fled to the dressing room.

"Never mind," said Madame Homer to the bewildered young man, "just dump the lot in my room out of her way. She mustn't be bothered."

Although we had another place for them, I was enormously grateful to her for this thoughtfulness, and I hope that she took home the sheaves of roses I urged upon her.

If there is one thing that an opera singer, more than any other mortal, must thoroughly master, it is the control of the voice under stress and strain. Thus, miraculous as it seemed after

such an emotional interlude, the third act progressed without incident; unless, perhaps, a little added brilliance. The fall of the final curtain was the signal for another demonstration, marked this time by the stampede to the footlights, the tearing and tossing of programs, the pounding of canes. When a speech was again demanded, Fremstad smiled sadly, with her actress's dread of anticlimax, and murmured so that only a few could hear her, "Another speech would spoil my first one!"

A wave of affectionate laughter swept over the crowd and the whole mood brightened, but the ovation went on and on. All told, there were more than fifty curtain calls given Olive Fremstad that night: I ticked them off myself on weary fingers, and reporters confirmed the tally next day. It did no good to lower the lights and let down the asbestos curtain; both had to be raised again. The last tableau, however, belonged to Alfred Hertz, the conductor. He was very lame and seldom came before the footlights, but now he heaved himself to Fremstad's side and muttering something to the public which sounded like "Have mercy!" bent his beard low over the hands of his Elsa. He kissed them with fervor and deference, then with a gallant bow which ignored his infirmity, turned and escorted her formally from the stage. It was all over!

Not quite: there was wild congestion in the dressing room and such a crowd around the stage door that we lost most of the flowers to eager, souvenir-seeking hands. I had feared a reaction, once we were at home, so had begged Charlie Dyer and some other old friends to come with us to supper. This was a diplomatic move and I congratulated myself more than once; for not only was the supper, by some miracle, really excellent, but pleasurable excitement soon took the place of grief; and by the time everyone had left, Madame was so tired that sleep was assured.

The next morning we saw that the press had had a field day. The affecting little prayer that Olive Fremstad had voiced before the curtain was taken to confirm the rumored strife and injustice in her managerial relations, and before anyone realized

it, a full-fledged revolt was set in motion. We heard that the Fremstad constituents planned to picket the Gadski performance on Saturday, and to stage a hostile demonstration inside the house. But the police got wind of this, I am glad to say, and the riot was quelled before it gained much momentum.

Madame, propped up in bed in a welter of newspapers, found the aftermath of the excitement hardest of all to bear. Her notices were eulogistic, the general stir she had created was a perfect bonanza for her publicity agent, and the number of telegrams and gifts which poured into the apartment for a week would have consoled the most exigent star in the world of opera. All of this she enjoyed in a way, but she had been profoundly shaken by the implications of her farewell to the Metropolitan stage, and she hugged her familiar cloak of woe about her for comfort, as she had done throughout her life. When some unknown admirer had the inspired idea of sending her a large silver-framed portrait of Richard Wagner as a memento, she unexpectedly clasped it in her arms and burst into the stormiest tears I had ever seen her shed. After this she felt quite restored in spirit and began to gather up the threads of the future.

## *Chapter 23*

THE SPRING concert tour did not materialize. I think that she may have canceled the few engagements pending, or else they had always been a bit of convenient fiction. In any case it was just as well, for there were phonograph recordings scheduled before her season really closed.

This was one of my most nerve-racking, if vicarious experiences. Mr. William Woddrop, a high official of the Columbia Phonograph Company and an ardent Fremstad admirer, had long been urging her to follow up her first essays in this field (which had been few) with a new series. She had loathed her

earlier experience and never did think that the royalties were adequate recompense for the nerve strain she had suffered. Also she did not—and this was more important—believe that the recordings did her justice. Of course they did not. Methods were still so primitive at that time that even the fabulous voices of the Golden Age, thus recorded, compare unfavorably today with the pipings of music-hall singers electrically transcribed.

I confess that Mr. Woddrop bribed me shamelessly to use my influence—if such it might be called—to induce Madame to make another try. My reward was to be a full set of all the disks she ever made, struck off for me personally. So I worked hard. I lined up a repertoire for her, using my ignorant amateur taste (Madame's own words) as a criterion of what I felt the public would most enjoy. Then I craftily pointed out to her what fortunes Caruso, Farrar, and others were reputedly receiving from their Victor recordings, and I finally wore her down. After negotiations which would have exhausted an entire diplomatic corps, she agreed to make twelve new recordings: five songs and seven operatic arias.

Most people have forgotten, if indeed they ever knew, what absurd places the recording studios were at that time. The Columbia headquarters were fortunately in the city, so at least we were spared the annoyance of a trip from town. Once we reached the scene of action, however, I decided that it resembled, more than anything else, a Hall of Fun at an amusement park. The whole thing was incredible. The singer, always dressed in formal attire, including hat and gloves, stood upon a small platform facing a curtain through which protruded a large tin horn. Into this she had to sing, and was required, moreover, to remember that while emitting high notes she must lean as far back as possible, but when singing low ones must sway forward almost into the horn's mouth. If, in the throes of dramatic feeling, she should happen to reverse this order, the results would resemble nothing so much as the amorous shrieks of back-fence pussies. Therefore, to facilitate these tricky gyra-

tions, there were handles for her to grip on either side of the horn.

Behind the curtain sat the technicians, with wax disks revolving and glass cases full of instruments, cotton, and needles, like a surgery. Beyond the curtain on Madame's side was the orchestra and the conductor. The latter stood behind her where she could watch him only in a mirror; and back of him were the musicians. They supplied the comedy element in the scene, for they were not assembled in an orderly body but each was assigned his place according to the number and type of vibrations which his instrument delivered. Thus the violins—their tone augmented by tiny megaphones over the strings—were the nearest neighbors, while trombonists were banished to the outermost corners, seated on high stools near the ceiling. Percussion was barely allowed in the room at all. Madame got halfway through an aria and caught sight, in her little mirror, of a tuba player standing in a door so far away that she thought he had either been forgotten or had just arrived. She stopped at once in the middle of a phrase and turning, called to him, "Ye gods, if I can get here on time, why can't you? This is a *Skandal!*"

The technicians swore softly, because the cutting had been perfect until then. Now it must be done all over again. The whole thing was a long and painful process, for often the trial disks, made before the singer was tired, were better than the master impression; but of course, once played, were no longer usable. It took us the better part of ten days to complete, none too satisfactorily, the repertoire which had been contracted for. At the end, in spite of a pleasing advance on royalties, elaborate expressions of regard and a large bunch of orchids from the directors, Madame swept ruthlessly from the studio never to return.

"*I du meine Güte!*" she exclaimed as she threw her orchids at Mimi and flung herself fully clothed on her bed at home. "All that work and nothing gained! When people play those things in years to come they will say: 'Oh ho, so that's the

great Fremstad! Well, I guess she wasn't so much after all! . . . Never again, Tinka, never again!"

True to her word, Olive Fremstad never made another phonograph record, but the few she did make are collector's items now, and although the recorded voice is a small, thin ghost of its real opulence, they grow more precious with every passing year.\*



At last we were free to go ahead with plans for the summer. But first of all, before leaving the city, a new apartment had to be found and the details of moving arranged. This was to be the recommended Park Avenue metamorphosis, and presently we found exactly what she and her decorator had in mind as a new *mise en scène*. It was a baronial little suite with high-beamed ceilings, a fireplace, and a view over the city, but—alas!—no room in it for me. I was secretly a little relieved that one of my problems was thus so smoothly settled. My mother was in failing health and I knew that I ought to live at home.

Madame's brother Joseph, the surgeon, was studying new methods of surgery in one of the big New York hospitals that spring. He it was who bound up Brünnhilde's twisted ankle with such skill at the final *Götterdämmerung*. He had also been present at all the farewell demonstrations and had been much impressed by his famous sister. I liked Dr. Joseph immensely. He seemed more like sister Livan than any of the others in her family, although he lacked her vividness and her imagination. She was very fond of him in a somewhat detached and critical way, and was obviously pleased to have a man of her own about to look after her. It seemed to me that it

\* Fremstad made only fifteen records in all, of which nine are operatic arias. The only ones which give the faintest hint of her artistic and vocal powers are "Connais tu le Pays," from *Mignon*; "Ora Stammi," from *Tosca*; "O Don Fatale," from *Don Carlos*; "Du Bist der Lenz," from *Die Walküre*; and "Stille Nacht." But even these are inadequate. The orchestral accompaniments are absurd.



was I who was looking after them both, but my capacity for that sort of thing was fairly elastic by this time and I was delighted when he decided to postpone his return to Idaho and spend the first fortnight with us at Little Walhalla. As it turned out, I had been far too optimistic. His visit was brief!

The woods around the camp were virgin forest, and there was enough chopping, trimming, and burning needed to keep an army at work for years. Livan promptly decided that Brother Joe's great muscular back and strong, clever hands were made for this very purpose. She bade me place an alarm clock in his room, ordered a sunrise breakfast, and presented him with an arsenal of axes, saws, mallets, wedges, and chains, sending him forth daily to do battle with nature. He accepted this assignment good-naturedly, and for four days the sound of the axe rang mightily among the pines. The fifth day he made us a fine woodpile of accurately measured fire-logs; but the sixth day I was summoned to Madame's room and was bidden by an operatic, pacing creature with flushed cheeks and blazing eyes to order a car and drive brother Joe to the afternoon train. Nothing was explained to me and my natural curiosity was quenched with "Do as I tell you, Tinka! . . . *und halt's Maul, gelt?*" This inelegant phrase sent me on my way, hoping that the Doctor would confide in me during the drive; but I was disappointed. He bade me a genial good-by as if nothing had happened.

"We will see him again when we go West this fall," Madame told me casually at supper. But our itinerary took us farther south and they did not meet. She always took the liveliest interest in him however; subscribed generously to his little hospital; and delighted to read his letters about the doings of the twin sons he had adopted. But as far as I know, Livan and Joseph Fremstad never saw each other again.

With difficulty I now composed myself to face a dreary, unpleasant summer, for Madame had been persuaded, because

of the growing unrest in Central Europe, to cancel both the Munich Kundry and a subsequent engagement in London. The decision had all but broken my heart. Of course Little Walhalla was a definite improvement over that dreadful camp in Harrison, but it was neither picturesque nor very comfortable: just a plain little house such as a child might draw, painted brown, with a screened porch, three bedrooms, a kitchen, dining room and living room, the last so crowded with an immense stone fireplace and a grand piano that there was room for little else. But the pines whispered softly all around us, the clear little lake lapped gently at our crescent of beach, and peace should have settled down there with us. It did not, of course.

As was to be expected, our wonderful Finnish cook took one look at the premises and gave notice. So for the rest of the summer my chief diversion was finding and breaking in a steady stream of her successors. It seems never to have occurred to me to get a cookbook and master at least the rudiments of the culinary art. On the whole I was probably wise not to have done so, or I might never have left the kitchen again.

To make everything more complicated, repercussions of the great farewell at the Metropolitan kept resounding and we had constant visitors, among them Olin Downes, later music critic of the *New York Times*, who was then beginning his career on the staff of the *Boston Globe*. His paper dispatched him to Madame in Bridgton to get a story and we entertained him like an angel unawares. We had a Swedish cook that week and as the berries were thick on the wild bushes we fed continually upon cold fruit soups. We had one made of blueberries for Mr. Downes which he sampled and straightway detested. He recorded this episode in his article and he also referred several times to Fremstad's "mouselike secretary," for which I have never forgiven him.

Others came and stayed longer: Rosie, who filled the place with merriment for a week; Miss Cather for a more sedate sojourn; an assortment of agents, photographers, coaches, and

accompanists; and finally a rather impressive new beau whom Madame had acquired during the past season. He arrived accoutered as for a weekend at Newport, and took unkindly to the surprises awaiting him at Little Walhalla. The poor man in his fine white buckskin shoes was made to tramp along soggy forest paths, was shaken up in rattletrap Fords over corduroy roads, and was hounded out of bed at dawn to plunge into icy waters. He brought with him the conventional hostess-gifts of candy and alcohol, but as Madame had a horror of both and promptly said so, he was free to solace himself with them. He did. And again I was bidden abruptly to drive a guest to the afternoon train.

And all the while preparations went on for the coming concert tour, and music rang through the trees. Squirrels and rabbits often seemed to halt their scrambles outside a window to listen, and vacationing tourists came up the lake and boldly anchored at our dock for a free concert. Madame tried in several ways to discourage this audience. First she sent me out to glare, but I was no good at it, so she came herself, eyes flashing and brows soaring. But the boaters only applauded her vigorously and returned next day in greater numbers, so she paid no more attention to them, except to miss them after they left.

All that spring my mother's health had been precarious and soon I knew that I should go home for a while. I was positive that during my absence Little Walhalla would go up in flames like its famous namesake, or at the very least, be deserted by the domestic staff. As the family now lived in New York I comforted myself with the thought of how near at hand the employment bureaus would be and how readily I could send up relays of cooks and maids as needed. This I actually did, and Madame had such a kaleidoscopic household that summer that she never even bothered to learn names, but called everyone Nana. I commuted back and forth from time to time, but I was at home when, in early August, war broke out in Europe. I fear that my first reaction to this world disaster was a thor-

oughly selfish and narrow one. "Oh dear," I cried shamelessly, "I simply can't bear it. Now we'll just stay right in Maine every summer . . . no more Aussee . . . no more München!" And how right I was!

While I was in the city I moved everything out of our old apartment, squeezing what I could into the baronial hall on Park Avenue, boldly selling the more glaring of the Wanamaker horrors, and shipping the rest up to Little Walhalla which, from the beginning, had been somewhat sparsely furnished. After the movers had gone I permitted myself a few sentimental tears as I walked through the dusty, empty rooms where so much had happened. I wondered who would live there next and if they would ever hear faint, ghostly echoes of opera in the night, of Mimi's excited bark, of the hum of the sewing machine in the costume room. The fragrance of grease paint, powder and wig oil still clung there and I wished that I could bottle it up and take it with me to keep, so potent and nostalgic was its spell. I took one final, delicious sniff, locked the door, and went forth into a changing world, muttering, as Fremstad always did on sad occasions, "*Tempora mutantur!*"

Many of these changes were already waiting for me at the camp, and the first one I noticed both pleased and hurt me: Madame had discovered that both she and Mimi could—for a while at least—exist quite well without me! Also she had lost ten pounds attempting personally to clear her woods; she had bought and was learning to drive what she called a "tin Lizzie"; there was an accompanist installed whom I had never even heard of; Mimi had been shaved like a poodle; and, in recognition of the mess in Europe, a French and an English group of songs were being added to the recital programs. But the most startling novelty of all nearly sent me back on the next train in sheer funk. Tentatively chauffeuring herself about, Madame's avid eye had spied a tract of land for sale, some forty or more acres of field and timber farther down the lake, with a beautiful high building site and a fine beach of silver sand. This

she immediately yearned with all her heart to possess. We had to chug up there and inspect it the very night I arrived. She stood poised on a sort of Valkyr's Rock, her eyes shining in the sunset, and suddenly threw back her head and shouted an exultant *Ho-jo-to-ho!* Her voice sounded marvelous. "You see!" she cried. "*Mit Hem*—my home! It was meant for me!"

"But what about Little Walhalla—you have just moved in. . . . I thought you loved that so much?"

"Yes," she admitted sadly, "you are right. But after all that is just an acre lot and a camp house that others built. We must keep our eyes on this now and be sure that no one else gets it, just in case."

"In case of what?" I asked. After my toil and moil in the city I did not feel that I could face another move for a very long time.

"In case the war goes on and I need a home," she said; and up went the tragic brows.

Fortunately a sudden shift of concert dates brought the tour much closer and all other matters were firmly laid aside. In three more weeks Madame was in New York heartily disliking everything about her new apartment. She particularly objected to the necessity of having me sleep on the living room sofa, but when I told her that I could quite conveniently sleep at home, she forgot her new-found independence and violently protested. Before we departed on the tour she had seen the plans of yet another apartment which was still under construction. Finding that the owner was willing to alter partitions to suit his tenants she joyfully signed a lease and told me that we would move there in the spring. I stared back at her with outraged eyes.

## Chapter 24

THE FIRST CONCERT was booked in Seattle and I was thrilled at the prospect of crossing the continent. We broke the journey briefly in St. Paul where Mrs. F. H. Snyder, the local impresario, met us and whisked us off to lunch. There were family and many old friends and no old enemies on the platform to welcome the famous local girl who made good, and Guy Bates Post, the popular actor of that period, caught sight of her from his own train window and jumped off, at the risk of being left behind, merely to kiss the singer's hand. Mrs. Snyder tossed a beautiful string of dark amber beads (for luck!) over Madame's shoulders as she said good-by; flowers flew through the air; and altogether it was an auspicious occasion. Mr. Georg Bruhns, the new accompanist, was suitably impressed.

The tour lasted several months and, after the first excitement, was very like every other train journey and every concert performance that I had lived through before. The train routine included the inevitable wet sheets; the hotels entailed the best suites which Madame now had to pay for herself, much to her distress; and the theaters necessitated for me the pre-performance inspection and regulation of "the white path." In those days singers wore elaborate gowns with long, sweeping trains, and as all theaters—even when newly swept and garnished—were sure to be dirty, a strip of muslin had to be tacked to the floor from dressing room to mid-stage, ending in a large square of the stuff surrounding the piano in case the artist grew dramatic and fell to pacing. If no one had been forewarned about this path it became my job to prod the local manager, making myself a complete nuisance until all was in order. For the benefit of transient dressing rooms I had sentimentally

brought along some of the chintz from dear No. 10 at the Metropolitan, and thus with the additional decoration furnished by the garlands of American Beauties which could confidently be expected, I managed to create what I considered a proper setting for Madame to meet the local bigwigs in after the concert.

Naturally, something could always be expected to go wrong, and I think that, in spite of Mrs. Snyder's lucky beads, our adventure in St. Paul on our return journey was probably the most picturesque. As soon as we were installed at the hotel and had received the press, rumors reached us that all was not well; in fact the town was split wide open over this concert and warring factions were out for each other's blood. We understood that a rival manager had booked another artist that same week and each representative claimed that the other had stolen his thunder. The advantage was supposed to be with us because our date came first; but the enemy was by no means defeated. When I got to the auditorium that evening everything was in darkness and a few stagehands were running about with flashlights muttering profanities. The house manager presently appeared with matches and a communique from the front: there were grave suspicions that the lighting system of the theater had been temporarily sabotaged. I blew up in a mild version of what they might expect when Madame arrived, but as was usually the case when there was anything really extreme to be upset about, Madame took it quietly. Lanterns and candles were set before her dressing room mirror, and out front the audience was assembling in orderly fashion, led to their seats by groping ushers. One could hear through the curtain the merry twittering in the darkness: everyone seemed delighted by this unusual situation. No one was in the least alarmed except the accompanist (another one now, Mr. Charles Gilbert Spross).

Electricians working feverishly at cables and fuses in the cellar kept sending up cheerful word that "all would be O.K. in a jiffy" and to "keep our shirts on." This we tried to do with some success for half an hour. Then, as the shadowy

audience ceased to twitter and began to cough—always a bad sign—Madame grew restive. Hastily she counted the candles on her table: there were fifteen.

"Go on, Tinka, take them out two by two and put them on the floor in a line like footlights. One on the piano will have to do. If Charlie doesn't know his accompaniments, it's too bad."

Thus I made my debut on the concert stage. When I crept on with the first candles I was overwhelmed by a round of applause which continued until the row was complete. Madame, her dramatic instinct pricked, seized the last two from me and, holding them high as she did the tapers in the second act finale of *Tosca*, walked out on the stage. The pianist, a bundle of nerves by this time, scurried through the shadows to his stool, and presently the concert began—appropriately enough with Beethoven's "In Questa Tomba Oscura."

If the saboteurs had sat up nights planning something helpful to the rival camp they could have devised nothing more spectacular than this. The electricity came on again just before the end and the recital was finished in a blaze of glory with a "Liebestod" by vociferous demand. This was probably the most unusual concert ever given in the Twin Cities and bannered accounts of it in the local papers were repeated throughout the land, to our great and endless benefit.

I think that the misdeed heaviest on my conscience in all my years of buffing was my failure, as we changed trains at Buffalo from Toronto, to recheck the trunks. It seems incredible that I could have been so careless, but we had whiled away the time between trains by going to a movie and having an elaborate supper, and this must have distracted me. Madame was particularly gay and carefree that night, for we had seen *Broken Blossoms* and she had fairly wallowed in her favorite form of intemperance—weeping happily and forgetting herself. When we were about two hours out of Buffalo, speeding gaily away from that deserted and helpless luggage, I made the staggering discovery—fortunately when I was alone in the compartment.



So I lay sweating coldly all night listening to Madame's care-free breathing, and devising ways and means of suicide.

At breakfast next morning I was so wan and anxious that Madame thought me trainsick. I left her under this delusion, deserted her quickly in the waiting room at Chicago (where we had a twenty-minute stop) and flung myself upon the mercies of the baggagemaster. He must have been the father of several young girls for he offered me immediate sympathy and his nice clean handkerchief to weep in while he telephoned his colleague in Buffalo. Miraculously the luggage was located at once and urgent directions given to ship it straight on to Detroit. In my relief I almost kissed my fatherly friend and sped back to Madame who, with an anxious eye on the clock, was beginning to fulminate.

"Well, Tinka, you look a little better, child. Fancy your succumbing like this! You should be ashamed!"

I was indeed but not for the reason she supposed. When the trunks were at last missed by Madame after we reached the hotel, I fear that I accused the blameless railroad company of carelessness. I even bragged how I, the clever secretary, had located them by long distance, and was warmly congratulated—to my shame. When the wretched things finally turned up, a bare half hour before the concert, Madame—recalling with pleasure the successful informality in St. Paul—seemed quite disappointed. She was wearing a very chic *tailleur* with a becoming velvet toque and, I think, fancied the sensation this costume would create on the concert stage.

Her recital gowns were always marvelous. She had one costume for each type of program. For operatic arias and the antique mood she wore brocades—green, rose, or gold, with flashing jewels and a tiara. For the women's club matinees, she had a little number or two that came right out of the pages of *Vogue*. For the programs of *Lieder*, folk songs and the inevitable Scandinavian groups she had devised a sort of super-*Dirndl*—black satin with an apron of delicate lace. But

her old reliable uniform, the best of all, capable of conveying her most gracious or most dramatic moods, was a model of classic drapery. She had one of these gowns in apricot velvet, one in white, and one in gray. With each of them she affected a golden girdle, a matching fillet, and there was always a diamond flashing here and there in the folds of the long chiffon sleeves. She never wore blue on any stage. "Blue and mauve are dangerous colors before the footlights," she once told me; "they steal from you and give nothing in return."

Of Olive Fremstad as a concert recitalist I do not feel that I was then competent to judge, for I resented so much her absence from the opera stage that I considered anything else a waste and an affront. Looking back, however, after all these years (during eight of which I was a professional music critic) I still cannot find it in my heart to say that the concert platform did not restrict her talents. True, she made of every song a little drama, and she touched with poetic fire everything that she sang, but it was like drinking champagne through a straw, or reducing a view of the Alps to a black-and-white kodak print. I used to wonder how she managed to give herself so completely to everything on her program, no matter how banal. There was a little ditty which she included as a salute to American composers called "The Sleep that Flits on Baby's Eyes" (I forget who wrote it). I could not bear a word of it and it always made me think of insects; but somehow Fremstad made of it a heart-warming, mothering lullaby which won every feminine hearer. As for her inspiration about digging up and dusting off that old Civil War ballad, "Tenting Tonight," it was sheer genius. When the audience, all too aware of the trenches, the blood, and the heartbreak in Europe, heard her sing those sentimental lines and saw the pitying, Sieglinde-light in her eyes, many sobbed aloud and raised such a storm of enthusiasm that she had to repeat it again and again. Apart from the Scandinavian songs (which always ended with an encore sung

to her own accompaniment) one of the numbers which I waited for—and during which my pulses pounded in the old operatic way—was Schumann's "Der Soldat." This *Lied* describes the emotions of a member of a firing squad whose gun is pointed at his best friend. When the victim looks up for the last time at the golden sunshine, the singer's voice became so laden with pity and horror that the moment was unbearable. I have never since been able to read or even think about any execution. Another Fremstad specialty, more familiar but none the less hair-raising, was Schumann's "Waldesgespräch." In this song, as everyone knows, a wanderer in the forest meets a mysterious and beautiful woman, a siren. When Fremstad exclaimed: "*Jetzt kenn' ich dich, Gott steh' mir bei!—Du bist die Hexe Lorelei!*" my blood, in company with every corpuscle in the house, turned to ice.

By such means, and other witcheries (including, of course, her marvelous looks and presence, her beguiling way of nodding her head shyly and jerkily, of whispering little "Thank you"s under her breath as she acknowledged the applause, her warm vitality on the stage, her gracious, spirited, and unpredictable behavior off), she won her concert public and journeyed from triumph to triumph back and forth across the nation.

In Spokane I saw with my own eyes a ceremony which I had never believed could actually happen: I saw a formal presentation of the Key to the City. This took place at a reception for Madame in the town's biggest hotel, with mayor, vice-mayor, aldermen, and other first citizens posing stiffly on the platform, a military band thumping, and a local Scandinavian chorus giving tongue. Mimi and I, lacking dress-up clothes, watched the proceedings with awe from a humble corner of the lobby staircase. We beheld Madame solemnly accept an enormous key-shaped object made of yellow chrysanthemums which she could scarcely lift, and heard her murmur what must have been an appropriate little speech of gratitude in first one and then the other of her mother tongues. After that the language of the

occasion became English and, following a toast to the diva drunk in *akvavit*, everything became extremely noisy. Just as I expected Madame soon put her hands to her ears and then to her throat, smiled apologetically, submitted to handshakings, and trailed determinedly toward the elevator followed by a proud bellboy bearing The Key. Around the edges of this towering structure she blew kisses to the crowd until the elevator bore her from sight, and a roar of clapping and "*Skoal!*" echoed after her. Mimi and I raced up the stairs and found her on a chaise-longue under the shadow of the giant key, laughing softly to herself. "Dear, dear people!" she whispered hoarsely, "but too much for me! *Um Gotteswillen*, Tinka, take that *Object* away—it frightens me!" So, to the accompaniment of Mimi's excited barking I dragged the Key to the City of Spokane into the bathroom and turned the shower on it. I turned the hot water by mistake, and that was that.

Other social obligations along the way Madame discharged more casually when she could. Frequently, if we arrived in time, the Women's Club or the Rotarians, or whatever organization composed her reception committee, would call at the hotel in an enormous, gleaming automobile with top down, to show the visiting celebrity the points of interest in the city. Almost always they were met by a shy, apologetic young girl who had been told to say: "Madame Fremstad wants to give you of her best tonight, and as she is so tired after her journey, she feels that she must rest. She hopes that you will not mind if she sends me with you in her place. I promise to tell her faithfully all about everything you show me."

Some said at once, "Oh, so that's it!" and drove away to cancel their reservations for the concert, but the majority accepted the disappointment with good grace and were charming to me. Once or twice the attention shown me was embarrassing, for the local managers invited me to lunch and, without preamble, offered me a job. Feeling flattered and important, I confided the matter to Madame. She threw me a glance which seared me from head to foot and instructed me to adopt hence-

forth a cold and distant manner with strangers. The next time a delegation came to take her sight-seeing, she and Mimi went and I stayed behind.



All told, the tour was rewarding and the season a good one. We had, in the course of the winter, traveled back and forth to New York, and the public which mourned Olive Fremstad at the opera had three chances to see their idol disguised as herself on the concert platform. Her first local appearances had been on October 31st and November 1st, when she sang with Damrosch and the New York Symphony. Although her numbers were only three excerpts from her Wagnerian repertoire, she was deluged with so many flowers and such deafening applause that, as the *Tribune* observed, she was affected almost to the verge of embarrassment. Visitors to the greenroom after the concert found her humbly insisting that the day belonged to Mr. Damrosch and the orchestra rather than to her. The fact was, she never liked to sing any part of her operatic roles in modern dress and without scenery to a public which had known them in the proper setting. To do so made her feel ill at ease and somehow presumptuous, as if she were trying to glorify herself rather than the role and the composer.

Matters were different in Carnegie Hall a month later. Then at last she stood before her judges as Olive Fremstad and no other, in a new and self-imposed medium, her first song recital in New York. Her manager had been ill-advised in staging this event in so vast an auditorium; unconsciously Fremstad assumed the large gestures and grand manner which had carried her art across operatic distances—and moreover, she had to rise above the depressing fact that the house was not sold out. Perhaps her publicity department had lacked diligence, or perhaps the hordes of her admirers were so sentimental that they preferred to remember her in her operatic roles rather than risk new impressions. It is hard to say, remembering the packed Metropolitan, why Carnegie did not bulge that day. Those that

were there shouted themselves hoarse, and as always, she "gave them of her best, her very best." She had nothing to complain of in her press notices next day, but she was more critical of herself than were her critics. She pondered long over the program, which she decided had been wrong. She thought that she had included something for all tastes—for all *good* tastes, though I always wondered why she bothered with anything but *Lieder*. In these she could find limitless opportunities for her interpretive genius and her deep human understanding, and they were the logical artistic sequel to all that she had done before.

The truth is that Olive Fremstad was as yet insecure on the recital stage. In whatever this artist undertook she had to pass through a process of growth—one of the fascinations, actually, which kept her faithful public enchained. But it was not easy for her to face the fact that despite the rapturous public greeting, the flowers, and her own dazzling appearance in a new, flame-colored gown, her first New York recital was no success. Her depression increased a few days later when she heard that the engagement had put her eighty-seven dollars in the red. Characteristically she profited by this lesson. For her next appearance in New York the following season, a smaller hall was engaged, the public filled it, and she was by then entirely mistress of the subtle art of drama in miniature.

In spite of the frustrations incident to this first concert season, Madame professed herself delighted with the new life, and before the year was over had agreed to be booked for more of the same in 1915-16. I myself heartily detested the whole business and felt so grieved about the Metropolitan that I stubbornly refused to set foot there even to inspect the talents of Madame Melanie Kurt whom I considered an unwarranted usurper. But Madame merely laughed at me and said I had a little soul. I noticed, however, that she avoided 39th Street and Broadway as pointedly as I did. She seemed to enjoy her brief sojourns in the baronial apartment and made several friends in the building. When the other apartment was ready for us, she

could not bear to leave, and somehow contrived to slide gracefully out of the new lease.



That spring she bought the beautiful land with which she had fallen in love in Bridgton, Maine, and engaged a delightful Norwegian architect, Mr. John Gade, to design her the house of her dreams. She also persuaded her new friends from Park Avenue to come for the summer to Bridgton and I was detailed to find suitable accommodations for them. They were all Christian Scientists, and as Madame had shown marked leanings toward that denomination of late, they dedicated the summer to her conversion. I, with my obstinate Anglican rearing, was plainly a lion in their path and they came prepared. They brought with them a young, unattached and serious girl who was not only a Scientist but a Norwegian. I took one look at her fresh red cheeks and golden hair, heard her soft Scandinavian voice, and feared that my doom was sealed. But somehow the plan collapsed. Madame enjoyed the company thoroughly and admired them too, but resisted all spiritual overtures. As for the *Norske Frøken*, she soon dropped from the scene quite without machinations of mine.

I do not know why this well-intentioned campaign was not successful. Fremstad, had she embraced any formal doctrine, would probably have subscribed to Mrs. Eddy's, for it appealed to her strongly. She bought me an expensive edition of *Science and Health* and bade me read it aloud to her every day for a while, but that was enough just then.

Later she tried a number of far less orthodox cults, including the teachings of the person known as the Omnipotent Oom. At heart, however, she was Methodist-Evangelist and could not change. But she was always credulous to a point which seemed to me quite incompatible with her intelligence, and doted on the occult. Even the Ouija board fascinated her and she would sit for hours diligently consulting it and always docile to its bidding. I, her usual partner in such incantations, found it an

irresistible temptation to nudge it a little toward the words I thought it ought to say, but such perfidy was on the whole quite harmless as it had mostly to do with food and housemaids. I would not have dared presume beyond these material concerns, although I used to wonder how far I could really make her go.

The summer passed with only minor catastrophies, and early in the following autumn I was told, to my hysterical delight, to get out the wigs and costumes again. Olive Fremstad had accepted an engagement to sing several *Toscas* with the Boston Opera Company, and an *Isolde*, a *Brünnhilde*, and a *Kundry* in Chicago. She was very keyed up about the *Toscas*, for the first of these was to take place at the Manhattan Opera House in New York. Although she was to be surrounded by rather a scratch company, she received a larger *cachet* than she had ever been offered for an appearance in opera. I imagine that the nostalgic sentiment still surrounding the memory of her farewell at the Metropolitan was counted upon to fill the house, which it did indeed; although the occasion proved in some aspects to be unfortunate.

For this return to the footlights new costumes seemed indicated and Lucille (Lady Duff-Gordon) was called in. She evolved two real masterpieces, full of delightful imagination and devastatingly lovely; particularly the second-act gown, a duplication of the Empress Josephine's wedding dress, silver lace and all. Olive Fremstad was so beautiful in this that merely to look at her was to relegate music, drama, and all else to secondary importance. This was, of course, mistake number one, for costumes should never intrude. A second error on much the same lines was far more disastrous, and Fremstad, with her infallible instinct for such stage matters, should never have allowed it to happen. Perhaps her own ravishing image in the mirror temporarily deceived her. The fact remains that there was a great curling bush of feathers fastened to the brim of her first-act bonnet which tickled the cheek of poor Zenatello's



Cavaradossi all during the flirtations in the church, much to the irreverent amusement of the audience.

But the major difficulty which she had to cope with in the performance was supplied by the Russian baritone, Georges Baklanoff, as Scarpia. He refused to exert himself in rehearsal to the degree she considered necessary, claiming that he knew the scene "even if she did not"! It served him quite right when, during the agitations of the Farnese Palace incident, he found himself completely at a loss and stood there helpless while she chased herself around the furniture without him. As one critic wrote next day, more in sorrow than in anger: "Olive Fremstad came nearer losing her grip than ever before on the operatic stage." I endured untold agonies in the wings and, once we were at home, read detective stories soothingly to the disconsolate Tosca during most of the white night which followed. All went much better in Boston when Madame wisely resumed her familiar costumes.

The Chicago performances of Wagner under Cleofonte Campanini followed soon and were, in spite of tenor trouble, the old lucent stuff which belonged to the great days. The Tristan was sung for the first time by Francis MacLennan, then the husband of Florence Easton who was later to become one of the most popular Metropolitan sopranos. From their very first meeting at rehearsal, Fremstad felt uneasy about this tenor. In the gusty throes of her work she was doubtless somewhat brusque in her suggestions to the cautious Mr. MacLennan. But he was stubbornly unreceptive. They played the passionate lovers as if each suspected the other of having bubonic plague. The Chicago casts were otherwise familiar and friendly. They included our dear Clarence Whitehill (with the last of the good wives now in attendance), Fremstad's compatriot, Julia Claussen, and the veteran Schumann-Heink whose Fricka in *Walküre* prompted one of the critics to remark somewhat unkindly that she should have eaten more heartily of Freia's rejuvenating apples while she had the chance in *Das Rheingold*—but was loved just the same.

## Chapter 25

IN THE SPRING of 1916 the lovely Norwegian house in Maine stood completed, and I had been given Little Walhalla for my own, in token of five years of service—the longest period anyone had ever remained in Fremstad's retinue. I was overcome with fervor and gratitude, but secretly I wondered a little when I would have a chance to live there if Madame kept on moving about to dwellings which included quarters for me. Nawandyn, the new place, provided for me handsomely with a room as colorful as the northern aurora.

While Madame went to a hotel in the city, Mimi and I and a tentative domestic staff journeyed in the rainy spring weather to prepare the house for the owner's home-coming. We had closed the Park Avenue apartment and its baronial furniture now found a perfect haven in the new surroundings. The enormous dropped living room with beamed ceiling and carved Gothic fireplace received it all as if it had always belonged; and the contents of the good old "homelike trunk" fell into place with equal ease. The Carmen portrait, the Sad Shepherd, the leopard and the white bear, the *Armide* dagger (latest addition to the collection), and even Lilli Lehmann felt at home immediately. It was perfect.

Mrs. Asa Neith Cochran, she who had once proscribed amethysts and all things purple, was again in favor. She now gave not only the place a name but insisted on a new one for its owner as well. The house was to be called Nawandyn, and Madame, if she was to be happy there, must henceforth be known as Nayan. The first stuck fast; it was musical and sweet to the ear and always seemed appropriate. The house has never been otherwise referred to; the name was painted in quaint lettering above the door with the date of building, and I hope

is still there. As for Nayan, it was always wrong. No one made more than the feeblest effort to use it, and even I whose aim in life was to make Madame happy, abandoned the attempt in a day or two. She often blamed her subsequent misfortunes on this lack of co-operation, but my conscience was clear. She was Livan; she was Madame; she was Olive or Olivia; but she was never, never an American Indian called Nayan.

Nawandyn was utterly lovely, brown and sprawling, with fretted balconies, red-hinged blue shutters, and great frothing boxes of geraniums at every window. Inside it was as colorful as an operatic stage set. In every room the trim and paneling, brightly painted in peasant style, contrasted with white plaster walls. The curving stair rail, carved with hearts and decorated in old reds and blues; and the gray-white dining room, with its copper pots on the hearth and its peasant embroideries and braided rugs, might have come intact from some cottage beside a fjord.

But Nawandyn was a big place to run. It called for at least two maids and a man, a staff which at no time was ever complete. Outside much had been accomplished under Mr. Gade's direction; the surrounding woods had been cleared and a winding driveway led to the house through an ancient apple orchard. There was a garden of sorts, a modest garage for "Lizzie," and the famous witch-hazel spring had a tiny house of its own. People came from miles around to gape and snap their kodaks. In the village shops postcards of the place—and some of Madame herself, hoeing or picking apples or laying the cornerstone—were on profitable sale.

We had many visitors, among them the late Maude Adams who, summering in the neighborhood, had written that she would like to meet that actress whom she most admired on any stage. She was bidden to tea on one of the hottest days I have ever experienced. The maids and I were all agog, they because they had never seen a "real" actress before, I because Miss Adams had been my childhood's idol ever since Peter Pan and Lady Babbie. I remembered her as a frail, elfin creature whom

one longed to protect. At the hottest hour of that steaming afternoon she arrived in a tightly closed, dusty little coupé, dressed in a heavy suit of Oxford wool, with high starched ascot, pigskin gloves, thick-soled brogues, and a white pith helmet. The maids, peering from the pantry window, had expected a vision in ostrich plumes and organdie, and were bitterly disillusioned.

"How very odd!" exclaimed Miss Adams in her funny, familiar little croak, as she discovered that she had run herself almost into a ditch and that it was difficult to emerge with any grace. But with my help she disentangled herself from the gears, caught up an incredibly long skirt embellished with a dust ruffle, and trotted up the fern-bordered path to salute the diva.

Later, as I passed cakes and listened to the tea-table chatter, I could not believe that this was my gentle elf, for Miss Adams disclosed a curious cynicism of which I would never have suspected her. She was as hard-boiled about the theater and its rough ways; the wiles of managers and the presumptuousness of directors; not to mention the flightiness of the public; as was Fremstad in her most granite moments. Shop talk flowed, but so did the tea, and it was only when I saw our guest tip up her teacup and look archly over its rim that I knew for sure that here was Lady Babbie who did the same on the stage of the Empire Theater for the beguilement of worshiping hordes.

Rachel and Malcolm presently arrived to spend the rest of the summer and to understudy me and any other defaulting members of the staff, while I went home for a long-delayed holiday. Mother was well again and had taken a cottage in Connecticut for my visit, and Father had bought a modest car. But I had scarcely settled down to pleasing Mother by being what she called "frivolous," when I received an enigmatic letter from Rachel which read somewhat as follows:

Better plan to come back as soon as you can, Tinka. Things are happening pretty fast around here and you must prepare for a shock when you arrive. I won't say any more because Livan will want to tell you herself.

I was mystified and disturbed, and although Mother was justifiably furious at this curtailment of my holiday, she helped me pack a hasty valise and saw me off at Stamford on the State of Maine Express that very evening. All night as I lay in my stuffy upper berth I tried to imagine what had happened. It could not be just the servants—that was such a familiar emergency that Rachel would not have sent for me on such grounds alone. Besides, the tone of her letter was not angry or upset, but merely excited. Could it be the Metropolitan . . . ? (My heart almost stopped beating at such a delicious prospect!) Was it a sudden concert date . . . ? A new manager . . . ? Or had Madame merely embraced a new religion . . . ? The wheels of the train did not turn fast enough for me, and as soon as I finally reached Portland I rushed to call up Nawandyn, although it was barely eight o'clock. Rachel, who had, according to the requirements of that household, been up since dawn, answered promptly but evaded my questions.

"You'll find out soon enough, Tinka. But I'll give you one little hint. We have had quite a lot of visitors while you were away, and one in particular has been kind of a steady boarder. Did you ever meet a Mr. Harry Brainard?"

Central cut us off before I could clamor for further details, but I brooded all the way out on the little Bridgton train. Could it really be possible that Olive Fremstad in her mature forties was, despite her vaunted contempt for such imprudence, behaving just like a traditional prima donna and falling in love with a younger man? I remembered Mr. Brainard well. He had been in the dressing room at the New York concerts and I had several times found him drinking tea with Madame in the baronial apartment. When I, struck by his charm and good looks, had asked Livan who he was, she had replied with what I now re-

membered as rather too elaborate carelessness: "Oh, he is just a would-be composer from up in your New England. No great talent, but I may sing one or two of his songs. One has to do these things now, you know!" I had straightway forgotten him then, as she intended that I should.

In Nawandyn he was alluded to belowstairs, with no very great affection, as "the Prince." Nothing had been too good for him. Madame had fussed for three days before each of his visits, driving to Portland for special delicacies, tramping the woods and fields for garlands for his room. She had even been to New York (without my knowledge—paralyzing thought!) to have her hair done and to play about with him at whatever distractions the summer city offered. In short, my worst suspicions were at once confirmed. But I was unprepared for the moving little scene to be enacted that night before the living room fire.

Rachel and Malcolm had been sent off to the movies and the stage was set. With great seriousness I was bidden to place myself upon a low stool opposite Madame and to give her my whole attention. Her eyes were wide and shining with that light which the portentous always kindled in them, and her brows rose and fell as if she were singing. I braced myself and so did she. Presently she took a long breath, gazed deep into the flames, and began to tell me, in beautiful dreamy cadences, that loneliness had upset all her fine theories, and that she, having found her true mate at last, was daring to marry again—"like a damn fool!" she added more brusquely.

At this announcement, a wave of mingled sadness and relief swept over me. Sadness because my work as her buffer was now over and this chapter of my young life at an end: relief that I need no longer dread the angry break which I had feared to be inevitable when someday I would have to tell her that I was through. Now, in a way, *she* was leaving *me*—which was much easier. With joy I could see her go, loved and protected by someone young enough to take the rough with the smooth as I had;

someone without rival interests, free to live her life, as must all who remained at her side for long. And best of all this someone was a man, and so she would not try to dominate him. (Or so I thought.)

"So my work is over!" I repeated aloud, and the words sounded so pitiful in my own ears that before I knew it there were tears spilling on my cheeks.

"*Blödsinn!*" said Madame briskly. "That is just what I wanted to talk to you about, Tinka. Quite the contrary, you now have a bigger, more important job ahead; two to look after instead of one. You hold in your hands the success of my married life . . . think of that!"

This preposterous idea, so gravely presented, filled me with that old desire to giggle. But this was a solemn occasion; I gave her what I hoped was a gently reproachful smile. "When do I meet him?" I asked.

"Tomorrow!" she cried. She sounded like Isolde at the beginning of Act II. I could almost hear the hunters' horns. But I had no desire to play Brangäne. As a matter of fact, the next day was spent in much the same way as the hours before a performance. Everything was attended to with nerves drawn taut; discussions were held in excited whispers; arrangements were meticulous; nothing was left to chance. There was even a tense interval in the dressing room and a period of rest and silence behind drawn shades just before train time.

Hal Brainard, for all his charm and good looks, was no Tristan, no young Siegfried, although he made conscientious efforts to master something of both roles. He was gay and amusing and as comfortable to chat with as another woman; but in twenty-four hours I knew that Madame would demand more of him than he could ever give. The night before Rachel left I sat late on the edge of her bed talking over the fascinating situation. She agreed that it promised little in the long run, but she felt that it was a godsend to Livan just then.

"Yes," I said eagerly, "and do let's be thankful that he is at least a gentleman!"



The wedding was set for the 4th of November and soon we all packed up and drove to New York to shop for the trousseau and attend to similarly pleasing errands. One of the first of these was to find an apartment suitable to the new menage, so it was more than a fortnight before all was accomplished. During this time, much to my surprise, Madame accepted an invitation from my mother to stay with us. I had rarely known her to visit anyone before, and I was even more startled to observe her artless and naïve behavior. Her display of wide-eyed innocence as she trailed Mother about the apartment discussing the mysteries and problems of married life belonged in an Edwardian charade. Mother, who had seen the Fremstad Venus, the Kundry, and the Armide, found this sudden coyness a trifle bewildering, but on the whole she was favorably impressed. Personally, I believed that Madame was already assailed by misgivings and was trying to force herself into a bridal mood. With Father her approach was different, and it further confirmed my theory. She would prowl about his study like a caged lioness, throwing him distraught glances from time to time.

"If you were my friend," she said at last, "you would tell me not to marry him!"

"And if I did, how long would you remain *my* friend?" Father asked her. He felt very sorry for her, but life had taught him caution about giving advice. Toward the end of her visit, after a festive dinner to which the entire wedding party had been invited, Father suddenly made up his mind. When she was bidding him good night, he took her hand in both of his and said, "Madam, I am ready to tell you now."

But she shook her head. "It is too late!" she said.

We returned to Maine in the flaming October weather, when a soft haze hung over the mountains, and it was as warm be-



neath the pines at midday as in July. For days we swept and garnished Nawandyn from attic to cellar. We wove ropes of ground pine; we polished silver and copper; we put tall tapers in every holder we could find. In the kitchen, cakes and sugared breads were baking from dawn to dark. Every day Madame went walking, to return with arms full of scarlet leaves, balsam, and the last goldenrod and purple asters. On Hallowe'en she lighted candles beneath her family pictures, sat down at the big piano and sang Strauss's "Allerseelen," working herself up into a fine emotional state which lasted until the wedding eve when Mr. Brainard and his best man, Joseph Beck, arrived. Then suddenly for a little while it was spring instead of autumn, and doubts and fears flew up the chimney. We rolled back the rugs in the living room that night and danced, Madame laughing like a girl as she struggled to teach her bridegroom the *Schuhplattler*, with poor results. She gave him a new name that evening. Mrs. Cochran had been appealed to and had come up with Havrah, which she guaranteed to be propitious. It always made me think of Turkish Delight, but it seemed to suit him well enough and everyone adopted it without protest. Madame conceded, however, that it need not appear in the marriage lines.

November 4th, the great day, dawned clear and warm. No one from either family was expected and no guests from the outside world except the press who had invited themselves, and some neighbors from farm and village. The ceremony was conducted by a flustered but immensely gratified pastor of a local church, and took place on the white bearskin rug before a carved credenza on which stood great sheaves of white lilies, the Fremstad flower. The Carmen portrait looked down through a nimbus of light from ancient beeswax tapers, and the *Parsifal* Grail of ruby glass from Bayreuth glowed mystically.

The only attendants other than Havrah's best man were two bridesmaids, Mimi and myself. I wore a new white dress, carried pink asters, and led my companion on a white satin leash

attached to a dressy little collar of sweetheart roses and baby's-breath. Mimi was very conscious of her importance and stepped daintily along with me on the tips of her pointed paws.

After us walked the bride, unveiled but sumptuous in a milk-white gown of ruffled lace. In her hands were lilies and in her eyes were stars. She could hardly have looked more beautiful, but I felt that she really should have been in costume, wig, crown, and all, for the whole scene was pure theater and only the footlights were missing. The domestic staff and press were at one side, the ranks of friends and neighbors on the other. There was no white muslin path, but down the center space, as on a stage, our little procession moved with dignity. A new phonograph blared forth the *Lohengrin* march, followed, during the service, by a record of Fremstad's own voice singing "Elsa's Traum." To my delight I saw the bride turn, on the proper note, the identical look upon Havrah that she had so often bestowed upon the fat tenor in the silver armor. He was suitably affected, but I feared that if the ceremony lasted one more minute I would disgrace myself, for laughter had begun to bubble in my throat.

I sobered myself sternly with a downward glance at the antique emerald brooch I was wearing for the first time. The bride had given it to me that morning and I could not have been prouder had it been the Congressional Medal. My heart swelled with gratitude and the laughter in my throat became suddenly a painful lump.

A Swedish cook had been specially engaged to make the wedding breakfast and of course she had outdone herself in the matter of fruit soups, whether the guests liked them or not. There was also fish in varying degrees of decomposition, chicken jelly, and a steaming tureen of meatballs in broth. In the center of the table stood a monumental wedding cake contributed by my mother, surmounted by a harp of gilded sugar. Messages and telegrams kept arriving without pause throughout the meal; the phonograph played peasant dances, and those who could, sang Scandinavian songs. We had harsh black coffee in

tiny cups, and then a toast was drunk in *akvavit*, the *Parsifal* Grail, in lieu of loving cup, passing from hand to hand. Covertly I watched the bride as she barely touched her lips to the rim where her lord had drunk. She looked frightened and dismayed, as if she had suddenly found herself playing some strange, incongruous role. The restless eyebrows were climbing higher and higher. I suspected that her heart was failing her a little and that she would have given anything at that moment if a curtain could be rung down, setting her free to go home in peace and read a detective story. When she went upstairs with me to change into traveling clothes, she was silent and distraught, examining herself long and earnestly in the mirror and sighing deeply. But the fine new suit and sables cheered her remarkably and bestowing pats, kisses, and checks upon Mimi, myself, and the maids in that order, tossed her bouquet over the painted stair rail in the best bridal tradition, and was off. She and Havrah and Joe Beck were driven down to Portland to catch the night train for the city, but the rest of us stayed thankfully behind for a few days to pick up the pieces.



Madame's first weeks as Mrs. Brainard passed harmoniously enough. There was the agreeable task of furnishing the new apartment, for which Havrah, with ample cash thrust into his hands, showed quite a talent. He haunted the best antique shops and sometimes he took Madame with him to an auction from which they returned with a furniture van behind them. Soon they had feathered a very luxurious and pretty nest; a lofty eyrie with a view of the East River. But as the weeks became months there was discernible the first faint reek of disaster tainting the air which blew around those heights.

Three occurrences, one trivial, the others more serious, gave me warning.

Since childhood Olive Fremstad had been a fine skater, and whenever there was ice on the lake in Central Park she was irresistibly drawn to it, even in the busiest midst of her career.

She had a special little fur-trimmed skirt and jacket, a smart toque to match, and carried a miniature muff. On her feet were always the best steel blades, attached to high white boots. I too, like every good Vermonter, was at ease on ice, although I had no such outfit. Madame and I enjoyed many skims together through the frosty winter air, paying small attention to the crowds of what she called "awkward landlubbers" who stared and followed after.

So now, when soon after Thanksgiving the red ball was hoisted for the first time that winter, Madame canceled all appointments, sent me out with Havrah to see that he equipped himself with the proper skates, and met us at the lake. She swooped and dipped over the fine fresh surface with her usual grace and abandon, but poor Havrah, who had not had a blade on his foot since school hockey days, was miserable. He shuffled along, growing pink about the nose and then a little purple. Madame danced up to us, did a spin and a loop, and was away again, her laughter ringing, while I was left to pilot the bridegroom. Presently he moaned, "Tinka, I can't stand it any longer. My shins ache!" So I led him to a bench to relax. When Madame flitted by and saw this, and his blue nose and watery eyes, she thought he was crying. Her lip curled.

"*Um Gotteswillen*, take the poor man home, Tinka!" she said, and left us on a fine, contemptuous backward outside edge.

"Come on, Havrah, buck up!" I said, for to my surprise there were now real tears on his icy cheeks. I helped him off with his skates, shed my own, and hailed a taxi.

"I shall have a terrible chill!" he sniffled.

"Nonsense!" I said, by this time thoroughly out of patience with both my charges. "You can't give in this way. There is far worse ahead!"

By this cryptic utterance I referred, in my own thoughts, to a performance of *Parsifal* scheduled in Chicago some ten days later. I had firmly made up my mind not to go along, although it was a hard decision. I adored Fremstad's Kundry and a refreshing blast of German opera was always the breath of life

to me. I stuck to my resolution, however, in spite of pleas and threats. I handed Havrah my theater notebook, spread the costume and wig and jewels before his bewildered eyes, wired Chicago that Madame would need the theater dresser on this occasion, engaged a hotel suite, bought the railroad tickets, packed the luggage, told the porter about the wet sheets, and bade them good-by in a lighthearted manner that was entirely spurious. My final word to Havrah was a repetition of Madame's familiar motto: "One learns best the hard way!" Neither of them thought me in the least amusing.

Three days later I met the returning travelers at the station. I was refreshed in body and spirit, but they looked bedraggled. "How was it?" I cried.

"Good notices at least!" croaked Madame, and without more words sank back in the car and closed her violet-shadowed eyes. She had caught a slight cold.

"Now, how was it *really*?" I asked again later when Havrah and I sat alone drinking coffee.

"My God, Tinka," he said dreamily, "she was so beautiful! But how, I ask you, have you managed all these years? I am pooped!"

The third incident to strike an ominous note in the love nest was of a far more sinister character, although its implications escaped many observers at the time. Early in the new year a certain musically disposed and well-heeled mutual friend, who had originally introduced the Brainards and thus felt herself responsible for the match, decided to give a large reception in their honor. Olive Fremstad who never, never sang at parties unless for enormous fees—and not willingly then—said at once that she would be happy to do so on this occasion for love only. It was assumed that the bridegroom would naturally play his wife's accompaniments, and this would indeed have made a touching tableau to climax the evening.

But something miscarried. It was whispered that Mr. Brainard did not fancy himself in the role of Madame Fremstad's accompanist and had publicly resented the suggestion; others

hinted that possibly he was not able to. Whatever the fact, I was bidden by Madame to engage for the evening Mr. Elmer Zoller, a sweet-tempered young German-American who was the latest in the line of her professional assistants, and I believe that she paid him well. I was not invited to the party, but Elmer reported to me that it was a very elegant affair indeed, that Madame had sung like an angel, in an atmosphere of hearts, doves, and cupids. I was the more surprised, therefore, when a day or so after the event she called me into her bedroom, shut the door and announced, *sotto voce*:

"Tinka, you must pack at once. You and I are going up to Nawandyn. I am suffocating . . . I must breathe!"

"And Havrah?" I asked.

She frowned. "And no Havrah!" she said.

## Chapter 26

A NEIGHBORING FARMER had made a fire in the Nawandyn furnace, water and power had been turned on, a path had been shoveled through the deep snow to the back door, but otherwise our welcome was bleak. The place was dark and dank as a tomb, with all the shutters closed, and the stale aromas of the wedding-baked meats and the withered garlands filled every room, at least in memory. My heart sank at once, but the pervading gloom suited Madame's mood to perfection. She forbade me to open any shutters save those in the kitchen. Then she straight-way took to her bed where she remained a week.

"Don't disturb or interrupt me, Tinka, except to bring a little food occasionally. I have to think."

Even Mimi, to her great bewilderment, was exiled with me, an ominous sign indeed. The situation was scarcely gay at best. There is no such isolation as the northern woods in winter; and certainly, shut up in a dark house with only a small dog and a

silent recluse for companionship, any normal twenty-three-year-old would find it depressing. I thought with longing of the weary, wearing hours of the opera season and wondered how I could ever have complained. One sniff of grease paint at that moment would have sent me into a hysteria of joy.

Being a Vermont girl, I was used to snow and loved it, but here there were no skis, no snowshoes, no sleds; in fact, no escape. I looked with homesick eyes at the smooth drifts and went out and made a few childish "angels" just to feel the soft, stinging stuff on hands and face. But Mimi barked so frantically that I feared Madame's solemn reveries would be disturbed, so abandoned further playfulness and returned to the only exercise available, strenuous but boring, of tossing heavy chunks of beechwood into the furnace's hungry maw. I felt like a small Nibelungen slave down there in the dark, stoking fires; but at least the dwarfs had other dwarfs to talk to. I heard no human voice, for even when I carried up her meals to her Madame either waved them away altogether, or merely pointed to a table. Once, however, she startled me by a question. . . . "Tinka, the lake is all frozen over isn't it? Tell me!"

"Oh yes," I cried, hoping recovery was at hand and that she might have thought about skating, "yes indeed; thick lovely ice everywhere!"

"Oh! Oh!" She fell back among her pillows moaning and pressed her hand against her eyes. "My poor child, have you no understanding at all? Now go, please, and leave me alone!"

Baffled and vaguely alarmed, I descended to the warm kitchen again, but there was no cheer anywhere.

To keep myself from going quite mad in the stillness and emptiness of the days, I decided at last to learn to cook. Borrowing a horse and sleigh from the farmer, I drove to the village and laid in supplies enough to cover any number of experiments. It was fortunate that I did so, for almost immediately a genuine old-fashioned Down East blizzard descended upon us and for three days we were cut off from all human contact. The power lines were down; our lights went out; and the pump ceased to

function. Fortunately there were dozens of candle-ends left from the nuptial illumination, but for water there was only melted snow. To me the emergency was a welcome break in the monotony of things and for a while at least I reveled in the picturesque hardships of the pioneer woman. Even Madame showed some faint signs of life, and on the morning that the storm ceased I noticed, when I brought up her breakfast, that one shutter had been set slightly ajar so that she could peek out at the snow-burdened pines. Moreover, she actually permitted Mimi to remain on her bed while she ate—the very best of omens!

With such encouragement, I rushed downstairs and into my apron. My one-woman cooking class had progressed to the point where I now felt competent to undertake a fairly respectable meal. Knowing by past experience what wonders could be wrought by good food, what disasters by bad, I nevertheless rashly decided to gamble all on a roast chicken with cranberry sauce, and a noble chocolate cake. First I stewed the cranberries and set them to cool under a slightly opened window in the pantry; then I stuffed the chicken, mixed my cake and put it in the oven. Having a novice's respect for instructions, I dared not move about for fear the cake might fall. So, since it seemed to be snowing rather hard again, I decided to go out and sweep the porch and steps.

I was having a lovely time among the whirling flakes when suddenly, with a bang, the storm door blew shut and I heard, like the crack of doom, the click of the spring lock. I had no coat on and it was bitter cold, but what troubled me more was the thought of that cake in the oven unattended. I rattled the catch but nothing happened. Recklessly I plunged into the drifts to try the cellar door, but that was even more hopeless. As for the front entrance, that had not been opened at all and was firmly boarded up. I looked through the kitchen window and saw, to my horror, wisps of blue smoke creeping around the oven door. Clearly something must be done at once. The



thought of calling to Madame to come down and let me in was one to be rejected until after all else had failed.

Shivering now with both cold and panic, I remembered the pantry window. This was small, high, and opened only from the top; but there was a drift of snow beneath it, iced over by drippings from the eaves. Up this miniature Alp I climbed on hands and knees and was relieved to find that it would bear my weight. The window was narrow but in those days so was I. Unhesitatingly I flung myself through it head first. But I had miscalculated; halfway through I stuck fast, my feet waving wildly in the storm outside. I eyed with misgivings the bowl of cranberry sauce just beneath me, but hoped for the best and began to thrash about with a vigor which finally released me. But my entrance was so precipitate that I could not control my aim and hit the cranberries head on. I fell to the floor with a thump and the bowl broke in two and poured its contents over my face and shoulders in a flood of sticky scarlet warmth. I fear that I was a trifle noisy during this maneuver, and if I did not rouse Madame, Mimi's excited barking certainly did. Before I could pick myself up and wipe the juice from my eyes she was standing there in the doorway ready to pounce, a bed quilt wrapped about her like an operatic cloak.

Suddenly she gave a shriek and flew to my side. She was white and shaking, for of course she thought that I had split my head open and was bathed in gore. Then she realized her error, and leaning on the edge of a flour barrel, drew a deep, portentous breath as if taking time out to decide whether to scream with rage or laughter. The latter triumphed and, as I staggered, dripping, to the kitchen sink and poured a dipper of water over myself, her shouts of mirth did more for her than the previous bedridden days in a darkened room. From time to time as she sat with me in the kitchen that evening and ate the chicken (the only part of the menu which survived), she burst into fresh spasms of merriment. The next morning, when the sun came out upon such a world as she had not seen since her childhood in Norway, she was herself again.

"Everything is all right now, child. I know what to do!" she told me. She went about cheerily opening blinds and looking for dust. Eventually, when the telephone crew got through to us on snowshoes, she sent off a telegram announcing our immediate return to the city. Then she bade me order from the livery a two-horse sleigh complete with bells and buffalo robes, to take us for a drive before traintime.

We had been away nearly two weeks and came home to much business. A hundred telephone calls were noted down in Havrah's neat writing; on her desk were contracts for pending concerts awaiting her signature; and, most exciting of all, there was a veiled message from Gatti-Casazza indicating a desire to talk with her.

But characteristically, she had first of all to cope with the problem which she had gone away to solve. There ensued a series of grave family conferences, to the last of which I was invited, for it was concerned with packing and railroad tickets—a one-way trip to California for Mr. Brainard.

A few weeks later the entire bridal party, including myself and Mimi and Joe Beck, assembled at the station to see him off. There was a gentle melancholy evident at the parting, but no dramatics. I gathered that Havrah, in his turn, was merely going off "to think," and would, after the required interval, return chastened and shriven to his conjugal duties and privileges. He waved solemnly to us from the window of his compartment, half-hidden by the pile of magazines, books, and fruit with which his wife had sped him forth. But she turned away in silence to her old, single-hearted existence and presently recovered herself through her familiar panacea of hard and relentless work.

She told me that she never expected to see Havrah again. I could not believe this, but time proved her to be right. Before the season was over he sent for his furniture; it was to be shipped to Santa Barbara where he had established himself as a vocal teacher and coach. We heard reports that he became

both popular and successful there, but he and Olive Fremstad never saw each other again. A divorce on grounds of desertion was made final in 1925, and in the end he predeceased her by several years.



Negotiations with the Metropolitan were as slow and intricate as the deliberations of state, but they did go forward. Mr. Gatti, surrounded by others of the opera hierarchy, came to the apartment for tea one day, the olive branch in hand. I hung about as long as I reasonably could and later made endless excuses to pass through the room. The atmosphere appeared to be exceedingly cordial, with everybody paying everybody else compliments, and smiles wreathing shrewd and tired faces. The upshot of this conference was the offer to Madame Olive Fremstad of a contract to return to the Metropolitan. She was to make her first appearance on New Year's Day, 1918, as Kundry, and would sing some twenty-odd performances each season in her familiar German repertoire for a fee greatly in excess of that formerly paid her. This was a great triumph for Madame and she savored it for some time before signing. No announcement was made to the public until June, 1917, and in the meantime there were other matters to concern the press. On April 6th war was declared between the United States and Germany.

Now, with the turn of Fate's wheel, Madame Gadski's contract was expiring and it was natural that under the circumstances it would not be renewed. With the first onslaught of war fever, her ill-advised and tasteless dinner party in celebration of the *Lusitania's* sinking was recalled and small regret was expressed at her departure. I like to think that Fremstad's re-engagement had little to do with this and that Mr. Gatti was sincere and ingenuous when he told her, "We have found that the Metropolitan cannot do without you, *cara!*"

The whole city soon broke out in a rash of flags and uniforms. Citizens and aliens alike made haste to learn the words

of "The Star-Spangled Banner," which was played and sung in every theater, concert hall, and movie palace as inevitably as "God Save the King" in London.

Among the learners was Olive Fremstad, who wrinkled her brows over the intricate strophes in preparation for her annual recital at Aeolian Hall on April 14th. This was doubly important this year for she meant it as prelude and emphasis to her re-engagement at the opera, which was shortly to be announced. Except for her matrimonial upset, she had had a fairly restful winter with few engagements, and she greeted her New York public in splendid form. The event proved to be one of those special nights which all frequenters of the theater, musical or otherwise, encounter from time to time: mysteriously high-keyed, electric in atmosphere, luminous in achievement. She wore a new gown—an up-to-date version of her old classic draperies; she flashed with jewels in delicate compromise between profusion and restraint. Her head was high, her eyes alight from within, and her voice was more vigorous, elastic and controlled than it had been for several seasons.

To my mind there was only one shadow on this glamorous occasion. Dear Elmer Zoller, the patient, the plodding, the industrious, and the uninspired, who had passed through the rigors of concerts on the road without flinching, was replaced for the New York recital by Richard Hageman, a conductor at the Metropolitan with whom Fremstad had sung at Sunday concerts there. She felt that he had more authority and would give her better support. Once she saw what she must do, she gave this decision no regrets. She was fond of Elmer and she was sorry to hurt him, but when her work was in question, she, like most genuine artists, could be completely ruthless. Zoller tried to understand and, because he was a good and gentle soul, forgave her. He feared only that his reputation and his future might be injured. Actually they were not; Elmer had qualities which were proof against any such reverses. He became a busy, popular coach and pianist, but an untimely death cut short his career.

He generously came to the recital and applauded each number, which he knew almost as well as the singer. It was a riotous evening, creating an atmosphere of enthusiasm which needed the merest spark to touch off an explosion. There were certainly sparks enough to please everyone, and Madame Fremstad might have given encore after encore on into the small wee hours had she had the strength. As it was, she broke all the rules and repeated certain songs, when demanded, even in the middle of a group. She actually encored encores! When she sang Wolf's provocative "Ich hab' in Penna einen Liebsten," and then when the resulting thunder had died away, dared to sing it over again, the critic Herbert Peyser, who was standing near me, groaned aloud: "Such an effect can be created only once, by sheer genius. She is foolhardy to risk an anticlimax!" he whispered. But when the encore ended he clapped his hands until they hurt. "By heaven," he cried fatuously, "she did it even better the second time!"

She duly sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" and invited her audience to join with her, but she omitted her smash hit of the road, "Tenting Tonight," as perhaps too naïve for the sophisticates of Manhattan. She was well pleased with her evening's work and with the notices which burgeoned in the music columns next day. This was like old times! She even remembered to kiss the first man she met after the final curtain. This time it was none other than my father who, in full clericals, had come back to stand beside me in the wings. He was deeply moved, and blushed like a schoolboy.



On June 2, 1917, all newspapers published the formal announcement that Olive Fremstad had been re-engaged for the Metropolitan Opera. Music lovers were jubilant and the press, which three years before had been filled with letters of reproach and resentment, now rang with congratulations and praise for the management which had come to its senses at last. **BEST NEWS OF THE WEEK—FREMSTAD RETURNS TO MET** was a

typical headline. The original contract discussed over the teacups that spring had been extended to include other than the Wagnerian roles, but there were few such in her current repertoire, and it was obvious that if wartime feeling ran higher and the German operas were banned, there would be difficulty in filling out the number of Fremstad performances with Toscas and Santuzzas. So, in view of such uncertainties, the tumult and the shouting diminished somewhat sooner than the news had warranted. I felt all along that it had been too good to be true and was not surprised to learn later that summer that New York had, in a few short months, become less tolerant than war-scarred London, and that all Teutonic works were banished for the duration. Thus it happened that Johanna Gadski's inglorious farewell at the end of that season marked the final wartime performance in New York of opera in German.

Conferences with the Metropolitan were resumed in early autumn. There was already talk of English translations and Fremstad was asked if she would be willing to relearn her roles in that language if public sentiment was willing to compromise. It took her less than half a minute to reply with a resounding "No!" She had always been opposed to using any but the original texts of opera. Reporters had worried her on the subject for years and her answer had never varied: "If opera is to be given successfully in English, then the composer must have worked from a book in that language."

"Tinka," she told me crossly, as if rehearsing for a more public utterance on the same theme, "I get to know my roles first of all through the text; you know that, you have seen me at work. It would be more difficult to unlearn one of these now than to study a dozen new ones."

I duly transcribed a digest of these sentiments in an official communication sent Mr. Gatti, and the opera contract was temporarily set at one side awaiting developments. For a time, as a gesture of courtesy or perhaps as a subtle method of publicity, the name of Olive Fremstad was formally retained on the Metropolitan roster and her portrait was displayed in the lobby

of the house among the other artists of the company. But as the months wore on and no compromises were reached, both quietly disappeared. She was barely fifty years old at the time and might well have had several more seasons of artistic fulfillment had she been disposed to take proper advice and action. As it was, the last operatic performances of her career were as Tosca with the Chicago Company in Minneapolis during the autumn of 1918. She never stepped on the Metropolitan stage again except briefly at a gala surprise party given in February, 1933, to honor Gatti-Casazza's twenty-five years as general director. She had been seriously ill and had not appeared in public for a long time when, on this occasion, she was somehow persuaded to emerge from retirement for a night. Of course she did not sing, but as she swept graciously if none too firmly across the boards, which of old had known her wind-blown stride, the audience rose to her, though the greeting had a note of sadness, of infinite regret. The great days were gone beyond recall.

## Chapter 27

THE FIRST WARTIME SUMMER was for me a restless and unhappy one. I was growing up; no longer a *Backfisch*; no longer a sweet young thing. The few men I knew were getting into uniform and there was actually talk of girls doing the same. I felt vague stirrings of rebellion against this job of mine which held me now by chains impossible to break without emotional storm. I had become profoundly attached to this tempestuous and gifted creature for whom I had buffed through every imaginable vicissitude of professional and private life for nearly seven years. But I knew that very soon now the time would come when in justice to us both, I must step out upon my own. She had become too dependent, too inclined to shift responsibilities and blame to my shoulders, whatever occurred. It was

not good for her nor for me. I was still quite young but she was growing old and she must make her adjustments for the future before it was too late. I did not feel that I should figure prominently in such plans, but to leave her now when her luck was out seemed heartless, and all my hopes for the marriage with Havrah had come to less than nothing. We knew that with finality now. So I looked about with wide eyes upon the urgencies of war and wondered if perhaps the answer could not be found there. But in the meantime there was this difficult summer to get through.

Nawandyn, for all its still and colorful beauty, offered no haven at all. It was too full of memories too recent to be ignored. We stayed a few weeks, giving a concert or two in New England summer resorts, which paid fabulously for such fare in those days before the "straw hat" theaters offered more informal attractions. But we always returned to the big, silent house, now so empty of future. Of course this very summer when we needed them least, we had two excellent and seemingly permanent maids, but there was little for them to do. Madame had small appetite for entertainment and our visitors were few. I probably should have made an effort to supply more diversion, but I had little zest. Soon even the beauties of nature began to pall and I realized that for Livan the chief value of this rural retreat had been its contrast to her busy professional life. When I mentioned this idea she denied it stoutly and said she loved each tree and flower and that I was the frivolous one who languished for the fleshpots. Actually the ones who languished were the maids who loved nature not at all. Finding nothing valid to complain of, they decided to give notice anyway, just to relieve the tedium. As they did not really mean it, nothing happened, except that by midsummer we were all thoroughly on edge.

One afternoon Madame decided to seek distraction in a long drive through unfamiliar back roads. We climbed into the old Lizzie and I was ordered to take the wheel. I obeyed with alacrity, for whenever Fremstad drove herself she did so with the



tense concentration which she lavished on all her works, and the result gave pleasure to no one. The roads we traveled that day were too rutted and rough for relaxation and presently she began to ease her own irritation by heckling me. Now my years of buffing for Madame had certainly developed less than no conceit in my character, but there was one aptitude in which I felt a modest pride: I knew that I was a more than usually competent driver. So when Madame began to mutter about my carelessness and stupidity and to marvel that I had been granted a license, my pride was wounded although experience should long since have taught me to let such teasing go in one ear and out the other. As often happens, the more she deplored the alleged faults of my driving the more real they became. I began to skirt ditches by a hair's breadth and swing around blind corners on two wheels, bumping gaily over the corduroy with spring-splitting abandon. Presently I myself became alarmed and slowed down. "Please, Livan," I said, as bittersweet as I was able, "I know perfectly well that I am driving abominably, but it is at least partly your fault. If you don't stop badgering me I will run straight into a tree and wreck us both!"

Madame had never before heard me say anything as bold as this. Her eyebrows hit her hat brim, her eyes sharpened to steel.

"Fancy you daring to speak to me like that!" she cried. "Stop at once and let me out! I'll not ride another mile with you!"

"But Livan, look where we are!"

By this time she was livid. "Did you hear me? Let me out I say!"

To my own unutterable amazement, I did just that. Without another word I halted by the roadside, miles from nowhere, and watched her descend, stiff with indignation, Mimi cowering in her arms. Then I turned around and, afraid to look back, hustled poor Lizzie at top speed back to Nawandyn where, much to my relief, I arrived too late to catch the afternoon train. I was completely overwhelmed by what I had done, and well though I knew that my dismissal was at hand, I could not bear to leave

until I learned what had happened to poor Livan. I gathered up my possessions, pausing for many an anxious glance toward the road. It was getting dark now and I had just decided to swallow my pride and start out to find her, when I saw her out near the garage, having just been driven in on a lumber truck. Peeking through my curtains, I watched her stalk over to the house, Mimi limping wearily behind her, and fling open the front door. Something then happened in the kitchen, for I could hear an agitated voice followed by a slam. Then feet came stamping up the stairs and the door into her own suite closed with the loud click of key in lock.

Some time later, when hunger and curiosity drove me at last to the supper table, I found the maids in a terrified huddle. "Good-by, girls," I said, trying to choke down my salad, "all is over and I'll be leaving in the morning. I have been wicked and I'm awfully sorry, but I'll never be forgiven, so that is that!"

"Miss Watkins, dear," said the waitress in a scared whisper, "when I took her tray up just now, she scowled something awful and sent it back without so much as a look, but she gave me the letter that's there beneath your plate and said to be sure that you got it tonight."

I explored at once and there, sure enough, was one of her thick blue envelopes with my name written in her vigorous, uptilted script. It must, of course, be my *cong  *; and knowing her strict honesty in business matters, probably contained as well whatever bit of salary was due me. Naturally the maids were curious, but I had not the courage to open the wretched thing in front of them. "I know what's in it," I told them, "so I'll just take it upstairs with me. Breakfast at seven, I fear, for that train!"

When I reached my room I sat down dejectedly among my half-packed belongings, took a long breath, and forced myself to tear open the note. It was very short: "Dear Tinka," it read. "You were right and I was wrong. I'm sorry!" Folded inside was a check for one hundred dollars!

I rushed to her room, contrite tears flowing, but there were

to be no post-mortems. "I've gone to bed, kid!" she called through the door. "*Selbstverständlich*, I am a little tired. *Gute Nacht, schlaf' wohl!*"

Thus ended my first declaration of independence. Later that summer she had another *crise de nerfs*, in the course of which she slammed a door sharply in my face. I regret to say—and she was not more surprised by this than I myself—I opened it immediately and slammed it shut again with even a louder bang. This was disgraceful behavior for a girl who thought she was growing up. I popped through again like a jack-in-the-box and we stared at each other for a moment in wild surmise. Then I began foolishly to giggle, but she came over to me and put her hands on my shoulders. "It is not funny, Tinka. There is wrong thinking here. We must close Nawandyn and go somewhere else. Perhaps that will help us. Why don't you visit your parents? You would like that!"

"And you?" I cried. "You mustn't be alone!"

"Tinka-*Leben*," she answered sadly, "I've been alone all my life—a solitary pine tree on a hillside, buffeted by the winds!"

This sounded as if it should be set to music, I thought. I had heard her describe herself thus before and it was always a prelude to a debauch of self-pity.

"Come," I said in a businesslike tone, "I've a better idea. You can go with me to the little village of Arlington where the family is now. We'll find a place nearby for you and I will be around when you need me. You'll like Arlington; it's sweet and friendly."

We drove down together in the little old Ford; a dreadful journey which scraped the nerves like the gravel of the unpaved roads on which we traveled. As we approached the Green Mountains, although my spirits rose irrepressibly at the sight of my homeland, Madame refused to look at the scenery with any degree of enthusiasm. "It can't be compared with Tyrol, or even Maine, for that matter. So do stop bragging, Tinka!" she

exclaimed. One would have thought from her tone that she suspected the Almighty of having arranged these hills, streams, and high, open meadows as a special favor to the Watkins family; so why should she be interested? Her attitude toward the little town was much the same although she was forced to admit that her welcome there was cordial.

"No," she told my father (who ever since that kiss at the concert had seen her in a new light), "I shall not stay here long. It is your corner, not mine. Your friends, your altar, your home—all are here. Of course you like it; why shouldn't you? But to me it is nothing; I pause here only to get my breath. I must make my own world; I always have."

"You have indeed, Madam," said Father earnestly, "but sometimes I think that you haven't enjoyed it much." He meant this to be kind and sympathetic but he chose the wrong words. "Madam," gave him one of her most withering glances.

"Why, you poor little man!" she exclaimed, and left him completely bewildered as usual.

She paused longer and breathed deeper in Arlington than she had expected to, for presently she was snugly installed in a little cabin on the side of Red Mountain, not too far from human contact but with no immediate neighbors but the birds and the bees. This retreat had been loaned to her by the writer, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, to whom much of the township belonged, not only in acreage, but in deep affection. "Miss Dorothy" had known me since my childhood, and soon after our arrival it was natural for me to take Madame to see her. They made friends at once, in spite of the curious accent that Fremstad decided on impulse to adopt, and before I knew it the offer of the cabin had been made and accepted.

The problem of getting any kind of a piano up the mountain engaged us at once, because Fremstad without a piano was as unthinkable as Fremstad without food or shelter. Principally because it *must* be managed, it finally was, but she had to compromise with a golden oak atrocity with the tone of a barrel

organ. But at least it had all its notes and many of them were in tune.

The place was primitive enough—Little Walhalla was a palace in comparison—but it was like living in the treetops; and if peace was to be found anywhere at all it might possibly be here. Later, when I went up to see Miss Dorothy and thank her for her kindness, she said, with great understanding of heart, "It was nothing at all. I simply realized that Olive Fremstad needed rather desperately a hole to crawl into. I had the hole. I was glad!"

To my surprise few demands were made upon me during Madame's retirement on the hill. From time to time she rattled down in the Ford to get supplies and I guessed that she was cooking for herself rather than taking her meals at a tearoom on the road below her, as she had solemnly promised me that she would do. Meals were incidental in any case, for she passed her time chiefly in sleeping long and deep, bathing like a naiad in woodland pools, tramping endlessly through the white birch groves, and writing. She had begun to work on her memoirs and was finding it extremely difficult, for she had so many languages at her command that she slipped back and forth among them without noticing, and the resulting paragraphs were in wild confusion. She became hopelessly bogged down in sentiment as she relived her early Norseland childhood; and before she could even get the family and herself, aged twelve, across the Atlantic, she became discouraged and laid her pen away. She read several pages aloud to me and I found them full of charm and a kind of confused ecstasy; exactly the sort of thing one might have expected from a baby Brünnhilde.

I enjoyed even more the verbal reports which she gave me of her adventures in the Vermont woodlands. Apparently she encountered there almost everything but *Die Hexe Lorelei*. One of her tales concerned a large serpent which, from her description, might have come straight from Act I of *The Magic Flute*; but it might also have been a mountain rattler, except that she claimed it chased her for miles.

"*Na, Gott sei Dank*, I have good lungs, Tinka, for I ran and ran—and I prayed all the time!"

"What did you pray?" I asked, much interested.

"To *Der Allmacht*, of course! I said to Him, 'Please to protect my behind, dear Lord; my front I can take care of myself!'"

At this I laughed loud and long, for it was so exactly like her. She had always faced her troubles and feared nothing on earth but the knife in the back. "Now *there*," I cried, entranced, "that is the sort of thing you must write! It is priceless!"

She looked at me with scorn. "Nonsense!" she said, "what stupid advice! I think you must be jealous."

I laughed happily to myself all the way home. In this mood I loved her very much.



Eventually, of course, the wilderness began to pall, and one morning I found her pacing the cabin, breathing fiercely and flinging at the decrepit old piano looks of malice and hatred. "I cannot stand any more of this, Tinka! What shall I do?" she pleaded.

I had an inspiration. "They are putting on a play in the Town Hall," I told her. "They do one every year, and this time they have asked me to direct it. I haven't an idea how to do it, I . . ."

"Of course you haven't! What utter folly! What idiots!"

"Now you, Livan . . . you wouldn't help me with it, would you? It might amuse you a bit—and what a privilege for the rest of us!"

"No, child, I will not help *you*—you are quite incompetent! But I will do it myself. I will direct your play!" Her face took on the happy, dedicated look she always wore when setting out for work in any theater.

She was as good as her word—but alas, the results were not! The play was one of the more gossamer whimsies of James M. Barrie and the last thing it needed was a touch of Richard Wagner—which was exactly what it got. The local Thespians, who

normally spent their days in kitchens, fields, or schoolrooms, were of course terrified. They had not the faintest notion of the grand manner and resented it in every bone and sinew. They could not, would not, stride about, raise their heads and glare; nor would they beat their breasts or cling swooningly to the furniture. But they would gladly oblige her in one respect—they were perfectly willing to scream their lines.

That performance was never to be forgotten. It was a lunatic evening, full of roaring and ranting, sound and fury. Poor Mr. Barrie would have fled in terror and dismay. The house was crowded and some there were impressed, but not the celebrated directress who knew a mistake when she saw one, even if it was her own. At the end I made her take a bow and sent over the footlights a large bunch of flowers from village gardens. She received these with little grace. "A basket of fresh vegetables would have pleased me more," she declared with typical if not endearing candor.

That rackety event was the summer's finale and soon the "city folks," among them my family and Madame, had turned their backs on the loveliest of all Vermont seasons. I drove Lizzie home to Maine to hibernate and a few days later joined Madame in the New York apartment. She had settled herself fairly well and a maid of sorts was in the kitchen, but I noticed a puzzling lack of familiar objects about. The place looked like a hotel suite before the "homelike trunk" had been unpacked.

"Where is everything?" I asked her the first evening. "The Carmen shawl . . . 'Musica' . . . the leopard . . . and the others? I sent them down six weeks ago!"

"Hush," said Madame, "let them rest! I do not want them around me now. I have not touched the trunk."

"But Livan—you *have* to have them always! Why, they are part of you! They make your home!"

She stared me out of countenance. "I have no home!" she said.

Later she sent the faithful trunk, still unopened, to storage and ordered dust covers made for all her pretty wedding

furniture. Among these white-draped objects she lived as with a company of ghosts and, despite my shocked protests, refused to relieve the barren wastes with a single flower, book, or magazine. For some reason then unfathomable to me, she seemed happier in this sepulchral gloom than I had seen her in some time. I think it may have symbolized for her an unshackling; a flight into freedom. In any event, she now fell cheerily into a routine of her own which included much study and, for the first time in her life, teaching.

I had always dreaded the day when Olive Fremstad would mount this platform, for she had such small patience with anything but working "tigers," and there were so few of those at large. However, via the musical grapevine, it became known that she was willing to coach a selected few of the young singers then aspiring to her famous roles and there were many applicants. I was sternly banished while these lessons were in progress, but in the course of my duties I did catch a glimpse of one or two. They were elaborate affairs, complete with properties sent up from the opera house. She would not have thought for a moment of training a Waltraute except with spear and shield in hand; and if for any reason these were not for the moment available, then a tea tray and a broom must serve—and let him laugh who dared!

I remember watching her coach a gifted young woman, who is now an established favorite at the Metropolitan, in an episode from *Carmen*. Fremstad was tearing herself to tatters trying to inject the essential quality into the scene. "Open your mouth, *um Gotteswillen!*" she cried to the miserable pupil writhing on her chair. "I can't understand a word you sing!" A moment later I heard Madame shout in utter despair, "Not so wide, I tell you, not so *wide!* No man ever fell in love with a woman's tonsils—remember that!"

One fine day I noticed that the barrenness of the room had been relieved a little by a conspicuous new ornament on the piano, something I did not recognize. It was the size of a lamp



and its specific character was hidden by a square of scarlet silk brocade.

"Whatever is that?" I asked innocently that morning as I arrived for work.

"Aha!" exclaimed Madame with a curious relish. "Now let us see what *you* are made of, Tinka."

She strode to the piano and whisked off the brocade scarf. Underneath was a strange-shaped velvet box with hinged doors, like a shrine. She was about to unfasten these when there was a shriek from the doorway. A pupil had just arrived and was standing there with ashen face and staring eyes. "Don't! Don't touch it," the girl screamed, "I won't look at it again, I tell you! I'd rather leave forever."

"Leave then, poor child," said Madame. "Better now than disappointment and heartbreak later!" Turning to me she added inelegantly, "She has no guts, that one. Opera is not for her."

I had all this while been eying the strange object nervously. I do not know what I expected it to be, but the reality surpassed all imagining. Madame flung back the little velvet doors, and there was a large glass jar or globe containing something gray. A switch was snapped and sudden light brought this contents into strong relief. It was half a pickled human head which had been sliced through lengthwise in order that all the arrangements for breath and voice might be seen and studied in the original, so to speak.

Madame stood there smiling faintly, watching me with cat-like wariness. I did not scream or faint, but I thought for a moment that I might be sick. I stood my ground, however, and kept my eyes straight ahead.

"*Brava!*" cried Madame. "That's my Tinka! You would be surprised how few can stand it."

"No, I wouldn't," I said. "I think it is horrible. You will lose all of your pupils if you make them study that *Thing!*"

"I will lose none who are worth while," said Olive Fremstad, who had herself gone down to the Morgue, before *Salome*, to find out something about a severed head.

There was no more German opera in America now. Even concert programs were carefully censored; and there were few enough of these in any case. Only the war filled every mind. American boys were in the fight at last and everyone had a son or a husband over there. Kids that I went to school with were being wounded and even killed. I had to do something about it too. So I joined a women's motor corps and came to see Madame one day, very proud in a Sam Brown belt and a lieutenant's bars.

She took it badly. I think my uniform was just a costume to her; and what was I doing this sort of play-acting for? Such things belonged in her sphere only.

"What's the matter, child? Don't you have enough to do around here?" she asked when she had recovered from the first shock.

"Of course, Livan," I said, "and this hasn't really interfered. I serve only on my free days and at odd times, mostly at night. You haven't missed me, have you?"

"No," she said, "not yet. But there will come a time when a choice will have to be made. I too am busy, Tinka. I am singing for the boys, you know, at Camp Vail. Do you think they would like 'Tenting Tonight,' 'The Long, Long Trail,' or opera? In the latter case you will have to type out the English words, lots of copies. You'd better get busy!"

"Livan," I said earnestly, "*please* listen!" (I had been dreading this moment, but it had to come.) "Livan, you are not only busy, but you seem happy too—happier than for some time. You are, aren't you?"

"I am never happy!"

"I know—but comparatively speaking . . . ?"

"What are you trying to say, child? Out with it!"

"Livan, I want to go to France. Would you mind very much?"

"*Unsinn*," said Madame, "*lauter Unsinn*! Whatever gave you that idea?"

"I'm afraid that you did—in a way. The *head*, you know!"

"Whatever can you mean? I never mentioned such a thing."

Do your parents think this?" She was more upset than I had guessed. Her hand flew to her throat; a gesture I had not seen since operatic days.

"Please, Livan, listen! You didn't *mean* to; it was just that I found out that I could . . . that way. You see, the driving never worried me—I was sure about that. But seeing things—horrors, you know—I was afraid. But now I know I can stick it, that I'll be all right. I've got to go, Livan!"

On April the third, at three o'clock in the afternoon; exactly seven years to the very day and hour since I had walked down a corridor in the Ansonia Hotel and into Olive Fremstad's service, I walked out of it up a gangplank and sailed away to war.

"*Leb' wohl, Herzchen,*" she told me as I shed farewell tears on her shoulder the morning of my departure. "I will write to you and I will pray for you, but my heart is heavy. My dear, dear Matinka will not be coming back!"

I survived all the perils and uncertainties of torpedoes, bombs, shells, incendiaries, and Ford cars, but as usual Livan in her way was right. As her full-time buffer I never returned. But as her friend she never lost me.

## *Finale*

OLIVE FREMSTAD died in April, 1951, having long outlived herself. Throughout her active career she had claimed that between performances she merely existed; that life was empty and unreal until the curtain rose again. Thus when, by unhappy circumstance, it fell for the last time in the flood tide of her artistic powers, she had before her nearly three decades of unreality.

It always seemed to me unfair that she should have been kept waiting so long; she who had, in the persons of her tragic heroines, always contrived to exit so punctually, to expire so grace-

fully at the proper cue. She once confessed to me that during the long, impotent years, the idea of suicide had tempted her strongly but that she had stubbornly rejected it as sinful. She always had, beneath her professional glaze, a deeply religious spirit; and the early discipline of her evangelistic childhood remained with her to the end.

Strangely and sadly enough, the anticipation of death appalled her. She had succumbed to its counterfeit embrace with such regularity before the footlights that it should have been an old, familiar colleague; but instead, it loomed in her imagination as some stern and arbitrary *Maestro* whose harsh beat might well unnerve her. She envied Felix Mottl—under whom she had made her American debut—for to him it was granted to die in harness. One evening in Munich, while conducting a performance of *Tristan und Isolde*, halfway through Act I the baton fell from his lifeless hand. I always thought that Olive Fremstad deserved an equal indulgence of fate. In full view of some privileged audience she should have been snatched from the stage, astride a glorified, supernatural Grane; or, at the very least, she should have been allowed to draw her last breath on the final F-sharp of a transcendent "Liebestod." Instead, she sank, floundering and helpless, into the empty, echoing years.

They were empty years chiefly because she did not know how to fill them, and her pride would not let her seek advice. She might have had, in spite of declining health, a happy retirement, for there were still many old admirers and many young students who would gladly have sat at her feet. Her magnetism and her charm of intellect never deserted her; and she had, moreover, thriftily laid by the means to cushion her old age in luxury. But such was not her way. She felt, instead, a grim compulsion to hasten toward that hell to which she was convinced that she was destined, by denying herself any alleviation of her misery. This self-imposed chastisement seemed to provide her with a sort of inverse consolation, although it drove to despair all who cared about her.

On one of my last visits to her sickroom (from which, at her

express command, the gay spring sunshine had been rigorously excluded by shades and screens) she told me, in the half-hope that I might understand:

"It is not against the pain and the infirmity that I rebel, Tinka: I suppose that we poor humans must expect that sort of thing. No, it is because I cannot work that I fret and grieve." (*Tiger, tiger, still burning bright!*) "Work and hardship were my constant companions along my upward way: hardship at least I can still hold onto!" It was her method of maintaining what strength she needed, and it served her.

Had Olive Fremstad wished to lie beneath an ornate epitaph, a choice among hundreds of laudatory phrases could have been made from her files of press clippings. I think the one I might have chosen for her is a quotation from Emily Frances Bauer's review of the first New York recital. Others more distinguished have expressed their admiration more elaborately, but Miss Bauer is unaffected and to the point: "She never appears without opening for her hearers a new range of vision . . . she has fulfilled one of the greatest missions ever permitted to a human being."

But Olive Fremstad's final wishes were less pretentious, if not without drama. A long needle was to be thrust into her stilled heart, and then she was to be carried West to the little cemetery in Grantsburg, Wisconsin, to lie there in peaceful obscurity with her family.

Thus it happens that a plain stone, bearing only the name ANNA OLIVIA stands in the wind-blown prairie grass next to Marie and Esther, marking the grave of the first of the daughters born to the immigrant Norwegian preacher, Ole Fremstad, and his Swedish wife Anna.

After a little time no one will trouble to pause there and to remember what else she was; and the melancholy ghosts of Isolde, Brünnhilde, Kundry, Elsa and the rest (who found in her their most passionate and vivid incarnation, but have grown a little wan and irresolute of late) may scurry away in search of lesser solace and haunt her no more.



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